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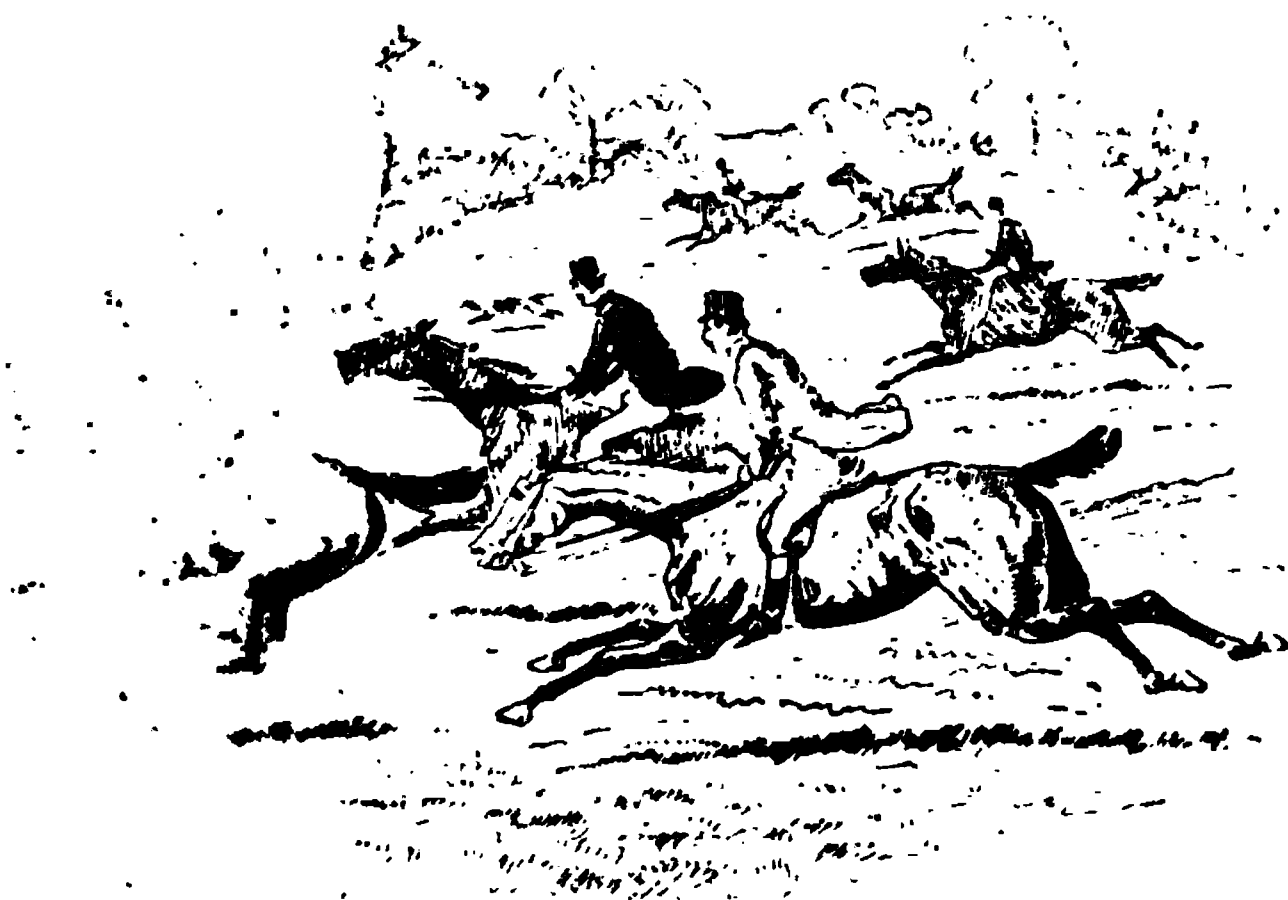
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WILD, FOREST, AND PRAIRIE

BY

W. PENNELL ELMHIRST

("BROOKSBY")



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[Frontispiece.]

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IRON-HOUND, FOREST, AND PRAIRIE

BY

CAPTAIN PENNELL ELMHIRST

("BROOKSBY")



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TO

ERNEST CHAPLIN

(LATE OF BROOKSBY HALL, LEICESTERSHIRE),

IN MEMORY OF MANY DAYS OF SPORT

AND MANY EVENINGS OF GOOD FELLOWSHIP.

THIS VOLUME

IS

Affectionately Dedicated.

October, 1891.

INTRODUCTION.

To those who, like myself, look to active, outdoor sport as the chief means of lightening and brightening life—or even as constituting its best enjoyment—I offer these reminiscences. They will serve their purpose if, with the aid of the spirited sketches that give point to many of the scenes, they enable some few men and women of like vein of thought to find an occasional half-hour's amusement.

To my old and kindly friends of the "Field," and to the Editors of the several other papers from which these jottings are culled, I tender my best thanks.

E. PENNELL ELMHIRST.

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THEN SPREAD OUT TO GALLOP AND TO JUMP . . . *Frontispiece*

WE BOTH FIRED AT THE SAME INSTANT . . . *To face page 10*

THE MISERABLE MUD-STREAM WAS FULL AS A WASH-PIT AT
SHEEP-SHEARING . . . *To face page 221*

THE STAG HAS TAKEN TO THE SEA. . . *To face page 232*

FOX-HOUND, FOREST, AND PRAIRIE.

MY EARLIEST SHIKAR.*

A TWO MONTHS' LEAVE IN THE MALAY PENINSULA.

Singapore, August 27.—Capt. C. (a brother officer of the 9th) and I with two months' leave, have come down here to try for some shooting in the Malay Peninsula. We had a passage given us in one of Messrs. Jardine's steamers, or could not well have managed it. Leaving Hong Kong on the 17th, we reached Singapore on the 25th. An eight days' voyage seems rather a long one to undertake for the sake of shooting, but it is not so much for the shooting only, as to get away from Hong Kong for a time. We are going up country with Tuanko Solong, a Malay chief, and I believe, a great sportsman in his way, and who happens to be just about to return to his own country for the elephant shooting. I must tell you the elephants come down from the hills at this time of the year, to feed on the corn and fruits in the plains, and there is more chance of bagging them now than at any other time. We have been obliged to spend a few days here to get things in readiness, buy provisions, &c., for our trip, in case game should be scarce.

* I prefer to offer the following as jotted day by day into a pocket-diary, and thence copied as a private letter to England, rather than at this lapse of time to clothe the bare outline with further details or in more complete language.

August 30.—We start at daylight to-morrow morning ; and have to go about eighty miles up the west coast to reach the mouth of the Moar river, which flows into the sea close to Malacca. We then turn up the river to get to our shooting ground, so shall not be able to begin work till Sept. 2 or 3, instead of the 1st, as I should have liked. We have hired a big boat of about 11 tons, called a tongkong, for our expedition. This requires five men, and will either sail or can be rowed. Her cost is a dollar a day. We shall have lots of room in her, which will be a great comfort, as we shall have to live almost entirely on board. I am taking my Chinese boy to cook for us, and C. has engaged a Malay servant who can act as interpreter, for Mr. Tuanko speaks nothing but his native gibberish. We have had a good deal to do in the way of getting steel tips made for bullets, and a thousand and one little necessities. Our battery consists of C.'s double smoothbore gun, of 12-bore, and his double breech-loading rifle, also 12-bore ; the last is a beautiful weapon, carrying steel-tipped bullets, 2 oz. in weight. Thanks to the kindness of friends, I am pretty well off for weapons. I have brought my 14-bore (smooth) with me, and a civilian at Hong Kong lent me a very fine double 8-bore (smooth), by Holland ; it will carry a ball of about 2 oz., which, hardened with a mixture of quicksilver, and propelled by four or five drachms of powder, would make a tolerable hole in anything. Lastly, though I ought almost to have mentioned it first, I have been lucky enough to get a double 10-bore muzzle-loading rifle, lent me by a man here, who has shot elephants with it himself. It is just the sort of rifle wanted for this work, and a bullet of $2\frac{1}{2}$ oz. weight, with a steel tip, should stop any elephant. Singapore is a most delightful place. Instead of the eternal brown barren hills as at Hong Kong, everything looks fresh and green. There are capital roads all over the island, which is nearly flat, and about fifteen miles long, and as you drive along you may almost fancy yourself amongst the green lanes at home. The heat, too, is not nearly so oppressive as in Hong Kong ; the sun has nothing like the same power,

though within one degree of the Line; and the nights are deliciously cool, the mornings almost cold. We are going into a very good game country, and certainly ought to get sport of some kind, either in the shape of elephant, buffalo, or deer, though it will be a great chance if we get a shot at a tiger in that part of the peninsula.

September 6.—We left Singapore on the 31st August in the tongkong, our party consisting of Capt. C. and myself, Tuanko Solong, the young Rajah of Johor—a great swell in his own country, five Malay boatmen, two gun carriers, both well tried fellows, and my Chinese boy as cook, &c. We had part of the boat covered over with mats, and secured ourselves a dry sleeping place in all weathers. Moving along the west coast of Johor, for about eighty miles, we reached the mouth of the Moar River on Sunday, Sept. 3. The scenery among the islands in the Straits of Malacca is very beautiful; the land is covered with splendid green forest reaching down to the very edge of the water. The next day we moved a few miles up the river, which is about 500 yards across in this part; secured two guides, old hands at elephant tracking; landed, and went out for an hour or two. Here we had our first experience of what the Malay jungle is to move through. The whole country is much the same, being one huge forest, with a dense undergrowth of thorny jungle of different kinds; and, generally speaking, a knee-deep swamp under foot, with the pleasure of floundering up to your fork occasionally in the holes made by the elephants' feet. It is necessary always to have a man in front to clear the way with his *parang* (heavy knife). Of course, this first day we found ourselves terribly out of condition, and returned to the boat about two o'clock regularly beat, and without having seen anything, though we heard that five elephants had been close to the huts of the natives, on the bank of the river, during the previous night. The people brought us some fowls, wild honey, and sugarcane for sale.

Before going any further, I must tell you our daily routine

the chance of getting a shot on Monday morning; so, taking with me one gunbearer and a guide, I set out to some trees we had noticed as much used for rubbing posts by the "gajas" on their way to feed. I was told it was "rather rot," and that I should be eaten by mosquitoes; but that if not dead by the morning, I should be met by C. and Tuanko, who would bring me some tea, &c. Just as I had arrived at the spot where I had intended to make a night of it, I heard elephants roaring some distance to the right, and as there was about an hour of daylight left, I thought I might as well try for a shot. Going about 300 yards through the forest we came upon an open swampy plain, some 300 yards across, and one or two miles long, with a few clumps of bushes here and there. We moved in the direction of the roaring, skirting the edge of the forest for about a mile. The sounds which had been kept up occasionally now ceased altogether, and we could make nothing of the whereabouts of the game, till, when we had gone nearly the length of the plain, we suddenly came in sight of the herd of from six to ten elephants, feeding quite in the open, and about 200 yards from us. There was not a single bush between me and them, so it was impossible to stalk, and going up to them in the open would have entailed an immediate stampede. It was a splendid sight to see the huge brutes feeding, their great forms moving about like perambulating houses, and the young ones, of which there were two or three (one no larger than a donkey) frisking round, hitting each other with their trunks, and screaming in their play. I watched them for about a quarter of an hour in hopes of some of them feeding towards me; but finding this fail, and the sun being nearly down, I sent off the tracker to get round them, and, if possible, drive them in my direction. However, just as he left me, they all turned and moved into a kind of promontory running out of the forest, consisting of high bushes, long grass, with a tree here and there. The ground between them and us was quite open, but as there was a single tree at the nearest edge of the covert, I made for this, in hopes of getting across without being per-

ceived. I fortunately managed to reach it, and found the elephants were quite close, the nearest not being more than ten or fifteen yards off in the thick covert. Rounding a bush, I found myself right among them ; but, though I could see two or three, I could not get a front shot at any. There was now only about a quarter of an hour of daylight left, so, fearing to lose the chance altogether, I let fly behind the ear of the nearest elephant, and in a slanting direction for his brain. (The brain, it would seem, is the only really proper place to shoot for ; an elephant seems not even to be inconvenienced by a shot in any other part.) He was not more than fifteen yards from me, and dropped to the shot. The left barrel of the rifle went off at the same moment, either from the heavy charge of powder, or because I touched both triggers in the excitement of the moment. Taking my other gun from the gunbearer, I ran towards the elephant, which had fallen, and which lay right between me and the others I wished to get at. I fired over him at two others moving across. The first fellow took no notice of the shot, but the second "got it hot" behind the ear, stopped, staggered, but recovered himself and bundled off.

The whole herd were now on foot, and all about me, no doubt confused by the firing right among them, for they ran about yelling and trumpeting, without either charging or flying. I loaded my guns as quickly as I could behind a tree, when I found the wounded elephant trying to recover his legs. Thinking to give him a finisher, I fired both barrels of the rifle into his head ; but this seemed merely to awake him, for he regained his legs and was shuffling off, when I snatched the smoothbore (8) from Houssan, ran round, and met him. I let him come on till his trunk, which he was stretching out towards me, nearly touched the muzzle of the gun, when I gave him a shot just over the eye, and down he came with a crash on his side like a dead horse.

It was now very nearly dark, so I could not follow the elephants, though, had another hour of daylight remained, I have no doubt I could have bagged another or two, for they

were scattered in all directions. Of course we had to give up all idea of watching now, and as it was impossible to return through the jungle in the dark, made up our minds to camp out. It took us an hour to make a fire, for, though I had a flint and steel for my pipe, we could not manage to raise a flame. At last a bright idea struck me—I tore the pockets out of my unmentionables, and, sprinkling a little powder on the rag, applied it to the tinder, and all three blowing at once we managed to get a blaze.

We were now pretty comfortable, for I had some cold venison and biscuit, and a flask of brandy in my pocket, and the guide had a lot of rice, so we did not go supperless to bed. Expecting, too, to be out all night, and knowing the swampy nature of the ground, I had brought with me a change of clothes and a mackintosh; so that, if the mosquitoes had not been so unremitting in their attentions, I should really have enjoyed the novelty of the thing. The next morning Tuanko appeared, and we went over a good deal of ground, in hopes of coming across some of the elephants of the night before, which we had heard trumpeting occasionally till about the middle of the night. We heard a tiger roaring in the jungle at no great distance from us, which Tuanko, imitating the sound wonderfully, drew to within thirty yards; but he must have scented us, for he could not be persuaded to show himself, and at last retired without giving us a chance of making further acquaintance with him.

We worked hard for the next five days without getting a shot, and only seeing an odd pig or deer now and then; but on Saturday, Sept. 16, we had our best day. Leaving the tongkong between six and seven in the morning, we landed at a small village, but hearing that elephants had not been seen for three days, had but small hopes of finding them. We struck straight away from the river, through a dense jungle, for about three-quarters of an hour, when we came into a rather more open forest. Proceeding through this for another half-hour, we suddenly heard a kind of low rumbling noise to our left, which we at length made out to be elephants, and moving in the

direction of the sound for about two hundred yards, found ourselves in a narrow open glade, with high grass and a few bushes scattered over it. Elephants had evidently just passed along this, and following the track cautiously, we found them just within the forest, and about four hundred yards from where we had first heard them. There were only two, and being perfectly unconscious of our approach we might have got within fifteen or twenty yards of them, and ought certainly to have bagged them both as they stood; but no sooner did Tuanko see them than, without waiting for any one, or considering the distance (some fifty yards), he let drive at the nearest. This, of course, obliged us both to fire too, and all shooting at the same elephant, he was very badly hit in the head, but managed to follow his companion who had bolted. We followed immediately, the track being very plain, and sprinkled with blood, with here and there large lumps of bloody froth from the wounded "gaja."

For two hours they led us a dance through the forest, the jungle getting thicker, and the trees fewer every minute, till at last the jungle was so dense, that, excepting in the road made by the elephants rushing through it, you could not see more than a yard or so on any side. We were now close behind them, and the wounded beast being "very wicked," as Tuanko expressed it, they were disinclined to run much further, and we could hear their angry roaring within a very short distance. We worked them through this sort of stuff for some time, they every now and then stopping, and, as we neared them, rushing on again for a hundred yards or so. We found, too, that they had now joined the remainder of the herd, thus making about five altogether. This also seemed to give them confidence, and in proportion as their pluck increased that of our tracker diminished, for he now refused to go any further, and knuckled up a tree. Tuanko had lagged behind, his feet, he said, being full of thorns; so C. and I, with our two gunbearers, went on alone.

We could not mistake the track, for it was impossible to

move in the jungle except along the lane made by the elephants, who were at this time about fifty yards from us, keeping up an infernal chorus of growling, trumpeting, and roaring. We hurried along as fast as we could over the deep ground; but two or three times, as we were close to them, they crashed off again for a short distance, and again stood awaiting us. At last they made up their minds to be bullied no longer, and, letting us approach to within twenty yards, charged down upon us with an awful crash, the dense thicket yielding like straw before them. We could now only wait for them and take our chance; the jungle like a wall on each side of us, and not a tree near to serve as shelter on an emergency. They came on till within about ten yards of us, before we could see the two leading elephants. C., taking the left-hand one, gave him a front shot, which stopped and turned but did not kill him, and he floundered off to the left, with as much lead in his head as he could carry with any degree of comfort. The other leader turned a little to the left at C.'s shot, and I was able to give him one between the eye and ear, which made him turn completely round, like a dog after his tail, blundering on and off his knees, and C. finished him with his left barrel behind the ear. The rest of the herd declined coming on when the two leaders were stopped; and perhaps it was as well for us that they did. We loaded as quickly as possible, and walked up to the dead elephant, but not being sure of the whereabouts of the others, kept our eyes about us. It was fortunate for us that we did not go up carelessly, for all at once we made out the head of an elephant, with ears cocked and ready for a rush, not five yards from his deceased relative. We both fired at the same instant, and he sank quietly down on his knees as dead as a herring. This was, no doubt, the leader of the party, who had quietly hidden himself, meaning to come down on us when we should be unprepared. There is generally one of these brutes in a herd—the most cunning and dangerous of the lot. Neither of the dead elephants turned out to be the one fired at at first; but we were pretty tired out, so were glad to give up.

WE BOTH FIRED AT THE SAME INSTANT.

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A who-whoop brought up our valiant guide and the rest of the party, who had deemed discretion the better part of valour. The elephants had most obligingly led us round towards the river during our three hours' run, and we now found ourselves about half a mile from the boat, and not sorry to be saved a long game of "hunting heel"—our general way of getting back to our starting-point.

For the next three days we moved up the river with every flood-tide, in order to reach Tuanko's territory, where, we were told, we were certain to kill buffalo. Sunday we did not go ashore, but during the ebb we landed for an hour or two on Monday (Sept. 18), and came across the haunts of the jungle-men. Their houses—by which title the interpreter dignified the few leaves and branches thrown over a horizontal pole—were littered with oyster shells, remains of roots, fruit, &c. We tried hard to find some of the individuals themselves, but did not succeed. These jungle-men are most extraordinary creatures; and it is still a disputed point as to whether they are really men or monkeys. They certainly have these huts, and are generally followed by a lot of dogs; they will also eat the flesh of the dead elephants. As far as we could make out from the Malays, they always avoid men if possible; but the natives do not fear coming in contact with them; they call them "orang outang," but that only means "wild man" in Malay, though it would represent monkey to our ideas.*

During the next night, and while lying at anchor, we heard something moving on shore close to the bank of the river, which we supposed to be either an elephant or buffalo. We went on shore at daylight, and found it to have been a rhinoceros by the tracks, which we followed up for some hours; but, unfortunately, getting separated, had to give up the pursuit, though at one time we must have been within one minute of him, for the mud rubbed on to the grass from his feet had not had time to dry.

* Written some years before the attention of the public was called to the wild men by Miss Bird, in her "Golden Chersonese."

For some days we worked hard after the buffalo ; but though we burnt a large tract of grass (the only plain we saw in the country), and watched night and morning by its edges three or four days after, in hopes of catching the buffalo coming out to feed on the new grass, which in that climate springs up almost in a night, we did not get a shot. Certainly their tracks were plentiful in the jungle, but they are very shy brutes, and difficult to find.

On Saturday, Sept. 23rd, I had a very hard fight by myself. We had been out for some hours during the morning without success, and made up our minds to a blank week ; we even thought of going back immediately to the mouth of the river, where we had seen most signs of elephants. In the evening I took my shot-gun with me along the edge of the burnt plain, in hopes of killing a few pigeons, accompanied by Houssan (my gun-bearer) with the 10-rifle and a few bullets, in case we should come across anything big, which I thought a most unlikely contingency, after the way we had worked every yard of the ground about.

After walking a mile or two and sitting down for a time, I turned back along the edge of the forest, having had one shot and killed an immense crane which got up close to me, when, coming suddenly round a corner, I found myself face to face with an elephant. He was standing feeding about fifty yards from me, in a kind of swampy creek, fifteen or twenty yards across, which bordered the edge of the jungle. I turned directly to exchange my gun for my rifle, but before I could get it from Houssan, who was some ten yards behind, the elephant had caught sight of me, and was retreating into the wood. I ran forward a few yards, and blazed both barrels at his ear. He was evidently struck, and, reaching the jungle, faced about, more than half inclined to charge. Fortunately he thought about it long enough to give me time to load, and by the time I had finished he had moved along some distance just inside the trees. I then ran back round the corner the way I had come, and met him just as he was leaving the forest. Not

being more than sixty yards from him, and the ground being perfectly open where we had burnt it two days previously, he saw me directly, and charged down forty miles an hour, his ears cocked and tail high in the air, looking "beastly ugly." There was no cover of any sort, and I had no spare gun, so I reserved my fire till he was within fifteen yards, when I took a steady aim at his temple, and fired. He collapsed in a moment, his ears and tail drooped, and, wheeling round, he was staggering off, when I gave him the other barrel behind the ear. He just managed to gain the high rushes at the edge of the jungle before he fell; he lay there struggling and unable to rise, and I of course thought that to all intents and purposes he was a dead elephant; so, after loading leisurely, I waded across to give him his quietus. It was now just getting dusk, and the sky dark and thundery, so objects in the forest were very indistinct, and I made an absurd mistake, which lost me my elephant. The only part of him I could see in the thick rushes was what I took to be his trunk and the outline of his forehead, so, calculating the position of the brain, I gave him the benefit of a steel-tipped bullet and 6 dr. of powder at five yards' distance. To my amazement I found I had fired into the side of his rump; his right hind leg as he lay I had mistaken for his trunk. The shot seemed merely to act as a strong stimulant, for it brought him on his legs as strong as ever. The smoke hung a great deal, and in trying to get clear of it my feet stuck in the swamp and I fell all my length almost under him. I thought it best not to move, but lay quiet with my rifle ready, expecting every moment to have the great brute on me; luckily, he had had enough of it, and instead of smashing me he made off into the jungle, and I never saw him again. But it was intensely disgusting losing him, after I had made sure of him.

September 24.—We did not like to give up the chance of finding the wounded elephant, so set off early to try and track him up. We followed him up for about an hour and a half, sometimes with ease and sometimes with the greatest difficulty,

over the harder parts of the forest, till we finally lost all trace of him on some dry hilly ground. Thinking, however, that he might have crossed this and entered some fine swampy jungle on the other side, we skirted the rising ground, and soon hit off a very fresh track leading into the jungle, and which we supposed to be that of our friend of the night before. We had not followed this up for more than 100 yards before we heard an elephant close in front of us, and a few yards further brought C. in sight of him. At this time I was about ten yards on his left, trying to get a view through the thick mass of thorns and rushes. C. whispered to me, "Here he is," but before I could join him the *gaja* had heard or scented us and was moving off, which obliged C. to fire as quick as he could. The ball, striking him on the side of the head and passing round, was, we found afterwards, left sticking in the skin, just below the opposite eye. He was

a royal brute, and round he came to the shot, charging right into us, till every moment I expected to see his huge head within a yard from out of the wall of thick rushes, &c., which surrounded us; but missing us he came right out on my gun-bearer, who, instead of being close behind me, as he ought to

have been, was some five paces to my left. The moment he appeared, Houssan, contrary to his instructions—though perhaps in this instance it saved his life, for the elephant was almost over him—fired a barrel of my 14-bore into his temple. C. caught sight of him, and fired almost at the same moment, the ball fortunately reaching his brain and closing his account at once. I never even got a glimpse of this elephant till he was in the act of falling, after receiving the finishing shot. He, or rather she (for it was a cow) was a fresh one, but had an old bullet wound in her stern, which accounted for her being so determinedly vicious, though the solitary elephants are always more or less dangerous. In this case I could probe the wound almost to the length of my steel ramrod, and eventually we cut out a small round brass bullet. We now tried for some time to regain the track of the wounded elephant, but in vain, and returned to the tongkong, seeing on the way numerous prints of buffalo, those of a rhinoceros and of a tiger, the latter very fresh, but we could not carry it far.

The next morning (Sept. 25) we made a final attempt at getting a shot at a buffalo—again no success. We then moved down the river, landing each morning, and working hard; but we saw nothing in the way of elephants till

September 30.—Landed on the left bank of the river, intending to cross a neck of land where the winding of the river made a kind of peninsula. After half an hour's walk we came across the fresh track of a single elephant, and another half-hour brought us up to him. He winded us, however, and was off before we could get a shot at him, starting with a roar and a grunt like a pig. We followed as quick as we could, but it took two hours' hard going to get near him, for he was determined to bolt, and not to fight. When we did come up to him he was trying to force his way through a thick clump of young trees; but as soon as he became aware of our approach, he gave up the attempt, and was rushing round them, when we gave him two longish shots, in hopes of stopping him, or inducing him to fight. He was a splendid bull elephant, or elephant

man, as Tuanko called him. He had tusks, though they were very small ones considering his immense size. I should say he must have stood fully 10 or 11 feet at the shoulder, two feet more than the ordinary size; but he must have been a thorough cur, for he only made off the faster for the shots; and though we tracked him for six hours more, and a great part of the time through thick rattan jungle, where he had plenty of opportunity for making a stand if he had chosen, we never got near him again. Just as we fired at him I got right over a nest of wasps or some little brutes even more venomous than wasps, who set upon me unmercifully, closing one of my eyes, and stinging my face and neck awfully. In trying to beat them away, my helmet came off, and as I should have had to wait some time before I could have ventured to pick it up, and I was in a hurry to follow the elephant, I was obliged to go without it, leaving one of the men to bring it on. The fellow did not catch us up for three or four hours; but as I had kept wetting my head as I went along, I did not feel any ill effects from being without the hat. We did not get back to the boat or get our breakfast till half-past six that evening. We were a good deal tired, but much more disappointed at having lost a chance of getting some ivory, for none of the elephants we had shot were tuskers. Indeed, it is only occasionally you come across a tusker in the Malay Peninsula.

We saw no more elephants before we left, though we stayed in the river till Thursday, Oct. 5, and reached Singapore Oct. 8.

After escaping all dangers in the Malay Peninsula, we had a very narrow escape on our way down from the Moar river. We left it on the morning of Wednesday, Oct. 4, and got along pretty well for two days on our homeward voyage, but on Thursday night we were caught in a squall about twelve o'clock, when six or seven miles from shore. Our mast and sail were blown out of the boat, the rudder broke, and we drifted about, at the mercy of wind and water. We got broadside on to the wind and tide, and the sea breaking

over us, were at one time in considerable danger. Fortunately the boat was very solidly built and the wind, instead of increasing, soon lulled a little, and we were able to let go the anchor, which, with the cable, we had insisted on being new before hiring the tongkong. For a long time it did not hold, but at last something caught it when we had drifted to within half a mile of the shore ; and keeping our head to the wind we were able to ride out the storm. At daylight it had ceased, and we contrived to rig up some sort of sail and coast along towards Singapore, which, the wind being fair, we reached yesterday. So ends our two months' leave to the Malay Peninsula ; a pleasant exchange for the heat and fever of Hong Kong.

THE PRINCE OF WALES AT MADRAS, 1875.



I.

EACH item of his Royal Highness's progress and doings was no doubt before the public, as the next morning they skimmed the telegrams over their breakfast. Later on they would read more fully from the letters of the "specials" how the Prince shot antelope, rode to pig, and witnessed the black buck run down by cheetahs at Baroda; and how, under an equatorial sun, he stood up to elephant in the jungle, and walked snipe in the paddy fields of Ceylon. I will speak only of what his Royal Highness saw and did of sport in Madras.

Nor must readers expect the orthodox Indian type, either of fact or narrative, in what I have to tell; for, as far as scene and circumstances would allow and British sympathies could contrive, the facts bore a marked English outline, while I promise the story shall be as free from embellishment as if it came not from the gorgeous East.

The long-and-much-desired trip to the Annamully Hills had to be abandoned, as the whole country from Mysore southwards across the Neilgherries to this fine hunting ground was marked and reported as cholera-stricken. So it was, to the same extent that any and every village and portion of India where natives do congregate in their crowd and filth irredeemable has its cholera cases at one time or another of the year. However, let this be as it may, his Royal Highness was obliged to give up his promised excursion against ibex, bison, and sambur, and to take his amusement in what the city of Madras could offer him,

embodied in the shape of racing, steeplechasing, and jackal hunting.

The first two, you may say, he might see much better at home. Granted, so he might; but that he saw much that was novel and much that was interesting in them here I will endeavour to show, and that he extracted much amusement out of all three I am prepared to assert. Take my assertion for what it is worth, but grant me a fair hearing.

One of the Prince's most conscientiously kept maxims would appear to be to "do at Rome as the Romans do," if we may judge in any way by the facility with which he at once assimilated himself to the ideas and customs of the good people of Madras. Without shirking one jot or tittle of the ceremonial connected with his visit, nor even after a day's toil allowing himself the luxury of a single yawn during the delivery of the dullest of addresses, he entered with hearty and most unmistakable enjoyment into all that was provided for him (whatever shape it took); stayed up with the latest, rose with the earliest, and ever appeared the freshest and halest of all.

So, on the second or third day of his arrival, 6.15 A.M. saw him at the racecourse, where, for some time previous to each meeting the whole sporting population of Madras daily adjourn at early dawn.

And now there was indeed to be a meeting, for was it not yclept "the Prince of Wales'," and was it not to eclipse every previous effort of its kind? A morning's racing was to be provided, wherein should be put before him the game gallantry of the Arab, the slashing stride of the ungainly Waler, and, still more remarkable, the power of these latter to race over four feet walls, in spite of shoulders that would make Mr. Thomas shudder, and heads that would convulse a Croydon crowd.

The Madras racecourse is situated some five miles out of the said city—though why it was ever allowed to place itself there, I have yet come across no white man of sufficient information

or imagination to explain to me. Each house in Madras is built in a compound of sufficient size to give it half a claim to the title of park, and all the racecourses in India might find intra-mural accommodation here without removing a brick, or interfering with any part of the road labyrinth of the municipal council. As the case stands, however, the racecourse, training ground, and centre-of-gossip remain a couple of leagues away; and to be present at the morning meeting, men—aye, and fair women too—are content to rise at 4.30, and drive out in the black night, wearied, apparently unwashed, and obviously unadorned. There is a refreshing balm, though, in the grey dawn, a reviving sweetness in the vista of foliage that daylight opens out; and when the bright verdant plain, backed by the green mount of St. Thomas, and by countless clusters of palms and banyan trees, gradually stands forth out of the darkness, you almost forget the self-hatred that animated you as you shuffled limp and half unconscious, into your clothes, nor waste a thought on the weary weight that the coming day will too surely cast upon your illused eyelids. Grouped on the stand or in the inclosure, knots of men are anxiously watching the gallops, as horse after horse is brought from the bamboo-built stables within the circle of the course, and goes by at his allotted speed. Many of these keen observers hold stop-watches in their hands, for Anglo-Indians believe strongly in the time test. Whether they are justified in their fixed belief is a matter of argument often revived; but surely if a horse can be made to exert himself with the regular exactitude of a machine, mark that fiery little bay Arab, Chieftain, now tearing along over the sand track as if he revelled in showing his muscle to the Prince. And here I may remark that he does make such an impression on his Royal Highness that eventually Chieftain took passage in the Serapis. The little horse deserves a word of description. He is barely fourteen hands, but compact and muscular as a hunter, with legs that are hard and smooth as steel, though he has run over thirty races and won more than twenty, and with a head and neck as clean shaped as a duchess's. As a specimen of

the blood from which our own grand racehorses have sprung and as a miniature model of what they should be even now, Chieftain is well worth the thousand pounds that has started him on his way to England.

Next look at those two most unmistakable Australian specimens just finishing their two miles through the deep sand (for the grass track is always reserved solely for the races), their two great ugly heads bobbing up and down together, and their ragged tails switching simultaneously. These are Artaxerxes and Red Deer respectively, and they will finish nearly together when the Sandringham Steeplechase is run. The gallant owner of the former has been fortunate in his nomenclature, but it is allowable to suppose that the proprietor of the latter must, in his fondness, have intended a compliment to his steed rather than to the beauteous denizen of the forest, for assuredly no red deer would ever face his shadow in a crystal pool with such



a figure-head. But when Capt. Bullen is asked to oblige the Prince by taking the horse over a few items of the steeplechase course (which forms an inner circle to the race-course) it is easy to see from the performance that Red Deer

has a better title to his name from his capabilities than from his appearance.

Nor is the course itself much more akin to that of Rugby, still less of Liverpool, than is the Indian chaser to his English *confrère*. A solid mud wall, or rather bank, over four feet high, is nothing much for a hunter to jump, but it is scarcely, one would suppose, adapted for a cluster of ten horses to race over almost at the start. The next jump, however, is pleasanter at a racing pace than at cooler speed, being a bank of the same height, but five feet broad on the top, and with a ditch on either side. Sixteen feet of clear water forms the next obstacle, and it may be given as no small proof of the jumping powers of the Australian that in the steeplechase in question not a horse fell or refused at any one of these three. Still, I would urge, courses of this description are in themselves sufficient to account for the comparative ill-success of steeple-chasing in India. You never ride over such country under other conditions; consequently but few horses are really taught to jump. Owners are afraid to risk valuable horses when a jostle may entail a broken back; and small fields and a lamentable scarcity of cross-country jockeys (for you can't afford to fall in India as frequently as on the soft turf at home) are the almost invariable result.

But it is now past seven o'clock; the sun is hinting none too delicately that we are in the tropics and not at Newmarket; the Prince visits some of the leading favourites in their stables, chats for a time under the shelter of the stand, where Madras turfites are now indulging in coffee; and when he moves off the assemblage breaks up.

I may pass on to another and equally congenial task, and tell how the Prince and his staff went hunting the jackal. But prithee, gentle reader, let me first turn aside but a brief space to touch upon one or two other incidents of this week of tumultuous festivity.

Of all the grand doings that convulsed and fluttered Madras, was not the Club Ball the greatest, the most fondly anticipated

of them all? Had not the P. and O. steamers arrived week after week laden with little else than ball dresses? Had not the club loungers been ousted from their most comfortable corners—nay, almost condemned to starvation for months beforehand? Had not a solid masonry staircase of fabulous breadth and terrific cost been erected, to be trodden only by the patent wellington of royalty, then to be pulled down rather than be degraded by any less worthy footfall? Had not tall palm trees been brought in alive and whole to throw their sheltering branches over couples dancing and sitting? Had not a special room for H.R.H. been furnished in a style that put every palace of the Arabian Nights into the shade? And to preside over the refreshment department of this had not the managers advertised for weeks past in the Madras papers for a “respectable young woman”—and alas, alas! none was forthcoming! Had not an enormous canvas banqueting-hall been erected, and a supper spread whereat a hermit must have feasted, or even the men of Madras found that they were thirsty? And had not every flat roof of the building been turned for the nonce into happy loitering grounds, mid flowers and shrubs, and Chinese lanterns thick as the sand on the sea-shore, to shed light and propriety on every nook and sofa? And was not the ball-room itself a scene “to be imagined” (a phrase we scribblers by literary license adopt when description fails us)? Thousands of crystal lights, hundreds of bright eyes, half that number of brilliant dresses, jewels, uniforms, glances, and smiles, the whole one blaze of light and glittering mirth.

The Prince arrived to find all in readiness to welcome him; and after he had run the gauntlet of a double row of beauty—close-packed so as to leave the narrowest of alleys for his passage—he led Mrs. Shaw Stewart, the wife of the president of the club, to a quadrille, and the ball began in earnest. Oh that his Royal Highness could have cut his dances into tiny slices, and distributed to each fair hungerer her little portion! Would not much heart-burning have been saved? Would not

that sharp weapon with which all the sex are gifted, have been wielded with less bitter force then and until now? Think you, would the dresses of one or two fair sisters have been pronounced so positively unbecoming? Would it have been so difficult a task to "imagine what anyone could possibly see in them?" Would their present and previous lives have been thought worthy of so much amiable criticism had not the royal command fallen upon them that they were to dance with their future King?

But every woman in the moment of triumph is a queen. She loses at once all sense of fear, all self-consciousness, all that mistrust of her own powers that the rougher sex are seldom able entirely to overcome on finding themselves suddenly in the presence of superiors. The sense of successful rivalry is alone enough to nerve her. She asks for no sympathy; she cares for no congratulation; it is enough for her that victory is hers. She will hold her head erect, appear as unembarrassed and engaging as in everyday intimacy—to all appearance unconscious of the buzz of personalities of which she is the object; or she may glance once proudly round with a look that says as plain as words, "Have I not conquered, oh my rivals?" However, as minnows may disport themselves in a salmon pool, the smaller fry made the most of their opportunity, and his Royal Highness was not the only one who enjoyed himself that night. Ladies in foreign Britain, it has been often remarked, ever dance with greater zest than even in merrie England. In their maiden beauty they find themselves more sought after; in matronhood they are not bound, Andromeda-like, by the chain of matrimony to the ball-room wall; while even in the sere and yellow leaf they may gambol sportively in the land of curry and rice.

So the Madras Club Ball went off happily that Thursday night.

On Friday the programme arranged for his Royal Highness comprised as much as would suffice at any ordinary time and with any ordinary mortal for a whole week's work. After

driving at three o'clock (and verily Madras is hot at three o'clock, even in December) to see some thousands of school children stuffed to repletion in his honour, and to have his ears tortured by the musical blessing they had prepared for his welcome, he reviewed the troops in garrison (a ceremony that admits of little variation except in degree of excellence, and this, I am told, was very excellent). He then met all the soldier-chieftains at dinner at the Commander-in-Chief's, and, with the banquet scarcely ended, was whisked off once more to witness the illumination of the surf, and afterwards the Pandal or native entertainment. The former was, in its way, quite the most striking and successful feature of the whole week's festival, and my humble pen must do its little all to convey anything like a fair idea of it to your readers.

The whole route along which the Prince proceeded on his after-dinner drive was illuminated to the best of Madras. The chief buildings all stood out in a blaze of light, every house and office had made its effort for the occasion, while Fort St. George was outlined on a scale that must have cost Thomas Atkins and his captain many a day's pay to effect. A rocket proclaimed the coming of the royal carriage, and immediately there blazed up from the ships at anchor a quick succession of gorgeous fireworks. The entrance to the pier was lit up with red and blue lights, while its whole length was gay with coloured lanterns and bright decorations. A car, somewhat similar in shape and ornamentation to those of a merry-go-round at a fair, was in waiting on the tramway, and forthwith the Prince and party were wheeled down the pier to the point where the surf broke exactly beneath them. There is always more or less sea rolling in from the open roadstead here, for, marvellous as it may seem, Madras has gone on flourishing for generation after generation without a harbour or breakwater of any description. To-night there was a glorious sea, and the surf burst in grandly and noisily, roller after roller, though the heavens were clear as glass. Boats had been moored just beyond the breakers, and their line of flaming torches cast a weird brilliancy on the foam-

ing waters. The beach, too, was light as day, and for a mile was crowded as even Epsom was never crowded. Thousands upon thousands of upturned dusky faces absolutely shone out in the glare, contrasting so vividly with the mass of white drapery that not even the cloud of many-coloured turbans served to suppress them.

Soon the order was given for the catamaran races to begin ; and two by two they dashed past through the surf from the shore to the line of boats and back again to the beach. At the same time balls of Greek fire were launched on to the open space which constituted the arena, and gave a wild, unearthly appearance to the canoes and their extraordinary occupants. The Madras catamaran boasts not of the outrigger balance-pole that floats alongside that of Ceylon and prevents it upsetting. Here it is apparently but a hollowed log of wood, manned (if the term may be applied to such uncanny amphibious bipeds) by naked kneeling savages, who are satisfied if but a part of their journey is performed in their frail craft. Yelling, screaming, and struggling, they strove, pair against pair, amid the roar of the breakers and the sulphurous foaming of the surf, and dashed straight at the huge boiling waves ; now overwhelmed, but emerging, still seated on their rickety craft ; now knocked over and separated, one or both, from their boat ; now scattered far on either side, and content to make their way on shore, there to await the drifting up of their property. Sometimes a more than usually cunning or plucky couple would meet an insurmountable breaker by racing at it with all their might ; then, just as it towered over their heads, and they seemed on the point of being demolished, plunge out of their places and dive, canoe in hand, through the heart of the resistless monster—rising again amid the Greek fire, and discernible only by the shower of green flame they appeared to shake from their heads, and resuming their wild career towards the goal and the victor's rupee. Often there would be two or three catamarans overturned almost together, and as many couple of occupants at one time struggling in the waves ; but they were struggling only

to regain their chance of the prizes, though to lookers-on they might have been battling for their lives. As well try to drown a walrus as a Madras boatman.

If I am right in saying the illumination of the surf was one of the most interesting sights of the week, I may venture the opinion that the entertainment at the Pandal (or Paundal) was one of the dullest. *Curious* it was certainly, especially for one new to the country; but it was neither exciting in itself nor calculated to give one an elevated idea of the manner in which the natives take their pleasure. Possibly, though, their impressions might be somewhat similar with regard to us were they taken to see one of our favourite burlesques; so perhaps the less we say on this head the better. They did their best, and they showed their loyalty bravely.

But when the Prince had taken his seat on the raised platform prepared for him (the golden fans set waving over his head), and the nautch at last began, it was certainly more calculated to soothe the weary spectators off into peaceful slumbers than to rouse them from the state of lethargy already produced by the heat and crowded room. Nothing could be more monotonous than the slow dancing of the nautch girls, as, holding in their hands coloured ropes suspended from the ceiling, they revolved round and round, and in and out, plaiting the ropes into a pattern in the course of their evolutions. The music which accompanied this performance reminded one forcibly of a fair at home: a feeble violin and one or two penny trumpets squeaked through a seemingly endless repetition of "Bonnie Dundee" till the dance was concluded. Then came forward a *première danseuse* in gorgeous garments and much-bejewelled nose and ears, to execute a *pas seul*. To the uninitiated she appeared to be suffering from a succession of fits, throwing herself down first on one side, then on the other, and indulging in a series of jerks and shivers that were anything but graceful to witness. However, so pleased was she with her own performance that it was somewhat difficult to induce her to stop, and the Prince was obliged to take refuge in the supper room for a short interval

of respite from the dancing. There was some singing (?) and more dancing on his return to the scene of action ; and, after his departure from the Pandal, I believe the entertainment went on far into the small hours, as natives are never tired of enjoying this their favourite recreation. The Pandal—which in this instance consisted of part of the Royapoorum Railway station, fitted up especially for the occasion—was decorated with gold and coloured cloth, arranged in intricate patterns on the walls and ceiling. Garlands of yellow and white flowers—never absent from native entertainments—also adorned the great building.

II.

WITH THE MADRAS HOUNDS.

The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well-nigh day ;
And our future king
Has gone a hunting
To chase the jackal grey.

OLD BALLAD (Madrasified).

AND so, in spite of all the exertion, fatigue, and late hours of the preceding and many previous evenings, the Prince held to his intention of hunting with the Madras hounds at daylight on the morning of Saturday, Dec. 18, and for this object was up and dressed by 5.15. By some accident he had to wait another half-hour for the brake that was to carry him and his staff to the rendezvous, so we may presume to take advantage of the delay to get on thither before him. The meet was at The Mount, the head-quarters of the Artillery, and some six or seven miles from Government House ; and there, as daylight broke, were to be seen Mr. Lodwick, Master of the Madras Hunt ; Squires, huntsman of the same, and *the pack*. Of the first named we need say little more than that his soul is in hunting the “jack,” and that under his leadership the sport flourishes amain. Squires is a little fined down perhaps from the jovial personage we used to see “yoicking” the Pytchley

on from Crick Covert, and hustling happily over the wide double ditches up to Lilbourne Gorse. A chequered career has been his. The Prince remembered him carrying his horn in Norfolk; afterwards he handled a pack at St. Petersburg; then he donned the white collar during Mr. Naylor's Pytchley *regime*; next he took service under Prince Esterhazy; and now he has pitched his bungalow alongside the kennels of the Madras Hunt. The success and steadiness that have accompanied him here should do much towards setting him once again at the head of a good pack at home.

Now let us turn to the hounds. Reader, there is a book that I have no hesitation in saying has long been common food for you and me—at least, if you are a member of that wide class of enthusiasts held in bondage glorious by the devouring mania of the Chase. If you are not, please turn aside at once to other pages; for here you will read of hunting to the end of my chapter; and you will only vote me a blatant nuisance if your sympathies lie not with me. Well, given that you understand by what current of feeling one in exile can revert at any odd moment to "Jorrocks," and from him imbibe deep draughts of consolation and refreshment, then I may safely ask you to recall Mr. Bugginso's contribution of hounds to the Handley Cross Hunt. Strange, but true, here is friend Jorrocks close at hand; and it is no difficult matter to dive among the well-thumbed pages and turn up any passage required. Mr. Pigg observed with much truth, on receipt of the precious cargo, "He was warned they'd be good for nout, or they wadna ha' parted wi'em at that time o' year;" and the substance of his remark can scarcely fail to apply in some degree to a pack imported complete, and at such a date, from a firm whose stock-in-trade is entirely dependent on cast-offs. Thus readers will not be surprised, nor I trust will the Madras Hunt be scandalised, when they see the term "miscellaneous" applied to the pack under notice. Mr. Bugginso's draft are described summarily as being made up of "skirters, mute runners, and noisy ones, besides a few worn-out old devils that

could do nothing but eat." It would be as untrue as ungracious to write this of the Madras hounds—they are not, and cannot be, immaculate; they have their vices and they have their virtues, both being beautifully various. Of their vices the last on the above list is perhaps the most prominent. But then, if rope is cheap in India, hounds are not to be landed in the country under £16 a couple; and so an M. F. H. in the gorgeous East can afford to part with nothing that can be coaxed or carried to the covert side. Breeding and crossing have been tried, but with little success; so the whole question of supply resolves itself into—first, how long you can succeed in keeping your hounds alive; secondly, how often you can afford to send home for more.

But among those now before us there are many couple of good appearance, and, as the event proves, several of sterling performance. Many of the dogs are fine, upstanding hounds; and some of the ladies look quite neat enough to go over a grass country.

By six o'clock a field of about fifty strong has assembled in readiness for the Prince's arrival, the master and two others alone sporting the orthodox pink; but the gay familiar colour looks depressingly out of place when, as in these two instances, surmounted by the necessary solar topi, without which the ride home might be a journey to a sick bed. Even the fair sportswomen who have joined this early chase feel themselves (except in one or two rash cases) obliged to submit to this unbecoming headdress. Most of the men are arrayed in serviceable butcher-boots, and anything that will tuck into them; but variety is here again the most palpable charm, as it is also in the matter of steeds, which comprise Walers, Arabs, Persians, country-breds, and nondescripts "of sorts" (as the term is hereabouts). For the use of his Royal Highness and staff a number of troop horses have been requisitioned, and, as cross-country work forms a leading portion of a cavalry horse's education in India, they may be considered as excellent mounts.

Soon the brake containing the royal party dashes up at a

gallop, the distance out of town having been covered at something a trifle under racing time, to make up for the precious moments lost in waiting for the conveyance. The Prince barely stays for a cup of coffee before getting astride the powerful grey to whom the responsibility is entrusted; and the staff scramble up at haphazard on to the hussar horses, the biggest men apparently coming in for the weakliest animals. The point of costume having been touched upon, I may add that the regular Indian untanned leather boots are the dominant feature of the dress of the Prince and his followers, though the exigency of the moment compels one gallant lord, whom I have oft seen riding out of Melton the smartest of the smart, to limit his riding gear to a piece of string tied below the knee of each trowser.

But now to business. We are all wide awake by this time, though many of us reached the meet with half-closed eyes. Oh, dear! this early rising is the most hateful portion of Eastern life—at all events, till you have been long enough abroad to subvert your whole system of living (natural and acquired), and feel comfortable upon the operation. Could we adopt the principle at home, think you, as our forefathers are said to have done? I fancy not—certainly for nothing short of foxhunting, and even for that I wist that the crowds of Leicestershire would exist no longer. However, whether you are a man whose habits were formed on a model of method and steadiness, whether you love your bed with the love of natural indolence, or even whether you are on the eve of getting a board of doctors to agree that your state of health calls for six months' recreation in the mother country—in any case loyalty demands that for this week you should burn the candle of your powers at both ends, should actively testify your enthusiasm all day, make merry all night, and, if need be, die contentedly when all is over.

But, though 'twere the last little spark in our souls,
We must light it up now on our Prince's day.

And to judge by appearances on this the last day of the week, the Prince himself is likely to be the only survivor; for while others, to a man—or woman—look haggard and worn with their round of dissipation, his countenance is as fresh and hearty as if ten o'clock had nightly seen him commencing to sleep the clock round.

To seek the wily jackal the pack are first trotted off to what is known as the "Old Covert," at the back of the Mount, and the field follow after, looking more like a party of African explorers on the march than a company such as the term *field* would usually imply. A cheer from Squires, and some guttural exclamations from his black whipper-in, proclaim a find almost before stirrup-leathers are adjusted or hatstrings tied—the ungainly sun-hats requiring to be positively strapped on to keep them in their places. Through the rough scrub and over the gravelly flat beyond, even a jackal does not leave a burning scent; and by the time he has reached the paddy fields a mile further, he has gained ground enough to double twice upon his track amid the rich green growth, and our first experience of riding over, or rather through, paddy commences. Please accept paddy, English reader, as synonymous with rice, and you will then need but little further explanation. Perhaps some few, though, may have been lucky enough never to find occasion for wandering far enough from their native land to be initiated into the system of rice cultivation. For these I may add that rice is grown, so to speak, *under water*, by means of flooding the low ground from the tanks formed on a higher level. Each little quarter-acre field is banked round, so as to be more or less independent of its neighbours. Mud and water keep the roots of the plant cool, while the stems grow to about two feet in height. In this we are accustomed to wade about after snipe, as long as our livers will allow us the charming sport; and now, forsooth, we are riding to hounds through it. Kneedeep we flounder on; but after all it is not as holding as steam plough, and horses soon learn to stride through it at

a hand-gallop, and to lift themselves over the intermediate banks without treating one to a mud bath.

Emerging again from this we start upon an even worse specimen of a hunting country—to wit, a plain of slippery clay, with holes as numerous as those of a sieve, and a foot deep in water. Over this hounds really settle to run both straight and fast, and we have to struggle and blunder after them as best we may; but, though an English horse would probably break his back in about a hundred yards of this sort of ground, the Walers, Arabs, and nondescripts aforesaid get over it in a marvellous way. There are few falls, and three or four ladies are pushing along in the van. Of course the pack soon forge ahead, but at length some good galloping ground puts the field on better terms again. Now they are running like steam, carrying a noisy head that makes one's heart rebound to the dear familiar music. To some eyes—ay, and to more than one pair that are already beginning to sparkle gladly—there is nothing in art or nature that can give half the unalloyed delight of the sight of hounds running hard. To many minds—perhaps to yours as well as mine, reader—there is nothing in life so ecstatic as the chase in full swing, whether we are racing over a grass country, popping in and out of stone walls, or even ploughing the deep of the Madras paddy fields. Ye gods, but it is jolly to be at the game once more, and we kick along joyously through the green rice, with the pack crashing and splashing just ahead. “Yonder he goes,” from Lord Carrington, who has chosen his line a little to the right, and who now gains a view of our almost brushless game, *lobbing* along to a well-known haunt behind a palm-covered village. Master Jack has had the ringing chorus in his ears for the last twenty minutes; but, though disdaining still to hurry, he is by no means within reach as yet. Just on the right of the hounds come three other greys, viz., those of Lord Charles Beresford, Squires, and Mr. Symonds, while close up on the left are riding Miss Crawford, Lord Suffield, Lord Aylesford, and the Master. Merrily

on to the cluster of huts, round which our quarry has often roamed, and where he hopes now to shake off his stubborn pursuers. But quickly he is pushed again into the open, though only to cross a mile of rugged plain, and gain a rocky hill beyond. Some forty minutes of hunting and galloping has brought us here, and all who know the spot declare that jackal was never yet known to break hence, and we must fain be satisfied with the sport already seen. But surely our gallant friend knows well the Prince is out, and now he will show him how an Indian jackal can run, and fight, and die. The hounds have turned him two or three times about the rocks, their speckled bodies glancing brightly among the dull brown boulders, and the hillside re-echoing with their eager voices, when 'Tally-ho! the great gaunt loping form bounds stealthily past behind the knot of horsemen; and, with a disdainful grin over his shoulder and a whisk of his meagre brush, our jackal strikes boldly over the open once more. There is no covert nearer than that bushy hill four miles away; and between it and here lies as fine a stretch of riding ground as is to be found in the Presidency—early paddy fields that have been harvested and dried, and through which run numberless water-courses varying from 1 ft. to 10 ft. in width. It takes a minute or two to get the pack out upon the line, for no one can "put 'em round" on this granite hill, while, as for the black whipper-in, he is apparently kept chiefly for ornament, as may be patent when I mention the fact that at the forthcoming Christmas tree, to be given to the school children of Madras, he is likely to figure as a giant merry-thought penwiper, having been fashioned and clothed exactly on the model of these ingenious toys.

But soon hounds are away again on a fiery scent, running as if they meant business—and blood. A quarter of a mile brings us to a river that owns no bridge and apparently no ford. For the glory of the navy, though, Lord Charles Beresford fathoms its depth, and half swimming, half plunging, gets to the right side without his helmet, for which he has to return and fish.

His brother A.D.C. finds a better place more to the left, and quickly the bulk of the field are pursuing the now flying pack. For twenty minutes the pace is glorious. The country wants only a handy horse that will keep his hind legs under him for the quick recurring little jumps. Grief becomes frequent, and even the pick of the horses begin to sob. Broken girths put down one of the leaders on to a soft black bed ; and the Waler, under the strange sensation of a saddle clinging to him only by a martingale, is buck-jumping round the field after the manner of his race. "Hold up, old horse, you're a borrowed one and a good one. Don't carry a muddy face home to disgrace us both !" This can't last much longer, or jackals must indeed be of diabolic origin. Hounds are now tailing, tailing, till, like a comet, their head diminishes to a point. No amount of cheering to the cry will make up for unavoidable want of condition and assortment ; but there is such a scent that the three leading hounds are straining every nerve ; and soon the fastest of the trio forges ahead and tears along the line alone. Now we are once more in growing paddy ; the pack close up a little more as the foremost hounds make a track for those behind. Now we are within a hundred yards of the sheltering rocks and trees, and our plucky jackal must have proved too stout for us. But when close upon the stronghold the leading hounds suddenly throw up their heads, the earliest of the scattered field pull up their blowing staggering horses to cluster about—loudly praising the charms of the run, which they assumed to have resulted in a clear victory for Jack, when from their very midst up jumps the gallant quarry, mud-stained and stiff, but game to the last. Round and round the pack chase him with maddened chorus. Now he gains ten yards in a high patch of the green paddy, now they are all but on him, but he whisks round a bush with a fresh start for his life. Now he feels he is all but penned, his limbs are failing him, and his head is dizzy with fatigue, so he turns round with the desperation of death upon his hated persecutors, and his instantaneous end is as gallant as the last hour of his life. "Who-whoop! who-whoop!"

How hoarse it made one to yell forth the now unaccustomed sound of wildest triumph once more ! "Who-whoop !" What a happy finish to a week of fun and excitement !

And it would have been a good run anywhere—for was it not a nine-mile point, and the line as straight as a hunting crop, the time one hour and a quarter, and the last twenty-five minutes a burster ? The Prince was up to see the brush handed to Miss Rideout, and to pay a welcome testimony to her gallant riding. The Master reserved the head, that, when mounted, the members of the Madras Hunt might have the honour of presenting it to his Royal Highness. Among the group who were up to see the good finish were, besides all those with whose names I have already taken liberties, Mr. Turner, Capt. Aylmer, Mr. Hunter-Blair, Mr. Shepherd, Mrs. Kenney-Herbert, and some others whom I, being a stranger in the land, did not know, or, having been told, have forgotten. This I do know but too well, that more than one rider had to walk back to where carriages and hospitality were awaiting them at the Mount, and that three horses succumbed that night to the severity of the run and the depth of the paddy fields.

A LEICESTERSHIRE SEASON, 1882—1883.

WET AND WONDERFUL.

OCTOBER BEFORE THE WIRE.

KNEEDEEP everywhere in grass—its hedges gigantic and dark—its ditches vague as the future and deep as destiny—Leicestershire wakes into life, in a month that knows no frost, no crowd, no toilette, but only a six months' vista of sport and hearty exercise. Fox hunting on the flags may have summer charms—to a few. Fewer still, beyond Masters, huntsmen, and specials, will make an occupation of it. Long pedigrees and straight legs, fashion and symmetry—all sink into insignificance against fling and drive, tongue and staunchness. The dash of the foxhound in the open, his rush through strong covert, and the force with which he strikes the keynote of a stirring chorus, are better a hundred times than the most seductive of kennel-parades. The one is action and life; the other little more than a reverie—a study of interest, perhaps—but owing its main attraction to association, memory, and hope. But, whether we have looked at hounds through the summer or not, whether we have worked or idled, whether we have been playing the Sybarite in London or the active rustic in our own hay field, whether in recent weeks our limbs and lungs have been stretched over the heather, or cramped in a gloomy office till partners should return from their holiday and our own turn come—we all revel heartily in the first fresh morning in the saddle, rise to enthusiasm as again we hear a foxhound, and welcome greedily any little scrap of sport that may be dealt out to us. Hunting men seldom find themselves entirely out of exercise.

The chances are they have been brought up on fresh air and outdoor work, and they find they cannot exist without them. So they are not likely to appear at the covert-side in a condition altogether soft and unmuscular. But summer occupations, how-



ever vigorous, may have been altogether apart from riding, and induced a muscular development that is altogether out of keeping with the saddle. The day following the first gallop of only twenty minutes, their backs may very likely ache nearly as much, the joints be as stiff, and their skin be as freely chafed, as if they had summered in absolute idleness. Much better, then, to begin gradually in October than to plunge into a martyrdom of six long days in early November. To wait till the season is in full swing, and then suddenly to rush into daily hunting—with sinews unprepared and legs too big for your boots—is to start in discomfort and proceed in misery. Men who have established a *pied à terre*—on however small a scale—in Leicestershire, generally begin work in good time, and are accustomed to look for some very pleasant breathers before the full-dress parades commence. Visitors would appear to be

swayed a good deal by fashion ; and, like beauty entering a ball-room, prefer to appear rather after than before their acquaintances. Well, the country is *terribly* blind ; already fences have to be jumped—and, without daring to proffer ungracious advice, I would yet remind them that more than one Insurance Company provides liberally against hunting accidents ; also that one of the great charms of October lies in the fact that *everybody* does not come. If they did, it would be altogether impossible for us and them to get over the country at all—and the delight of uncrowded gateways would at once be lost.

The grass was surely never so long, so thick and universal as now. It has beat the bullocks everywhere ; where the scythe has been at work, the edishes have sprung up again to mowing height : and the fences are half smothered in it. The farmers have at last had a good summer—and even venture to own it ; stipulating, however, in many instances the want of funds prevented their making full use of their opportunity. But they all look much more cheerful ; speak hopefully and encouragingly on the subject of fox-hunting ; and many who have lately been absent from the covert side will be able once more to take the place there to which they have so strong and honest a right.

If Melton Mowbray is to be the centre of fashion and the metropolis of the Chase—if even it is to pay its way—its patrons must show themselves as soon as possible. *No one* appears yet to have declared himself coming ; none of the houses that pass from hand to hand by the season have yet been taken, and the hotel keepers have not had a nibble. The church bells are chiming Home, Sweet Home day and night, and The Butcher in blue is ready to kill his fatted calf or turn a somersault over any stile strong enough for the job. But no one comes ; and even the blithesome printer of cards of the meets has a haunted hungry look. It cannot be said nowadays that Melton is not accessible. It has railways to it from every direction, and four different routes to London—while, for fear it should lose touch of Leicester, the Great Northern last week opened a new con-

necting line thither, giving inquisitive travellers a passing glimpse of such classic localities as John O'Gaunt, The Coplow, and Scraptoft Holt.

The Quorn had their maiden scurry on Monday, Oct. 2, from Gartree Hill, which a month hence will be resplendent with fair company and fine clothing for our gala day. It was scarcely so this morning—at least there was little of the resplendent about the select assemblage clustered there an hour before shaving-time. Six autumn captains waited on the Master, and saw just a fox apiece break away. Hounds were loosed upon the last fugitive ; and fox hunting again became a reality. So the early birds sped over three fields, and opened as many gates, to Burdett's Covert. An old fox took up the cue—and the fun began. The Great Dalby parish is fascinating ground at any time. But fascination and fear may be associated ; and the latter was by far the dominant sensation now. So everyone stuck manfully to the road for five minutes, and let hounds get half a mile start of them, before conceiving the idea that fences were only put into Leicestershire to make it pleasant riding. Coming to their right minds, they suddenly set to work to follow. But there was a curious novelty in the moving scene as the pack came down the vale from Dalby Windmill, heading for Melton. Old and bold Reynard was well in front—and so, contrary to all accepted usage, were hounds, with regard to their field. The young entry, however, had scarcely yet dropped into the spirit of the thing ; had failed to get quick enough through Burdett's Covert, and were now bustling on in keen curiosity after the two redcoated figures representing huntsman and whip. At a long interval half a dozen darkly clad horsemen straggled after ; but over the Dalby and Gartree Hill road the pack had it all their own way ; while the little coterie behind them mounted the hillside in a kind of dazed bewilderment as to what new experience might overtake them next. Their horses were lathering and blowing already ! they had accomplished a fence or two, it is true, but how and in what fashion they themselves would have been puzzled to tell—except that the place looked green and looked

possible, that the horse jumped extraordinarily big, and that they had landed safely. And now they rode with confidence, if with a certain amount of cunning—choosing always a sturdy place at which a horse must rise, and avoiding any gap where a ditch might be hidden under the dense matting of grass and leafy thorn. The pastures and meadows are velvet—the former wavy-brown, the latter a brilliant green, but both with a yielding turf under their luxuriant covering. Providence helps us so far—if horses are fat and unfit, the ground is a springboard. The half-forgotten sensation of sweeping a flying fence sets the heart aglow, and makes the brain almost whirl. You catch your breath with a gasp, as the free-jumping horse drops lightly on the greensward—all the old charm comes back again, and life once more wears its brightest aspect.

This first twenty minutes fun—over the great Dalby slopes to Burton Lazars—was very refreshing, very invigorating. Arrived at this point, it was decided to leave the old fox to go his way, and to return after the scattered cubs—one of whom was soon served up on the altar of education.

It would be impossible to dissociate Gartree Hill from the memory of the late Capt. Edward Hartopp—the news of whose death came so sadly and suddenly upon us only a few weeks ago. For the last two seasons he had been absent from the Dalby Hall, while holding the Mastership of the Kilkenny Hounds; and it was mainly to his personal popularity that that pack was enabled to continue in the field while others were everywhere compelled to yield to the pressure of Irish agitation. In Leicestershire he not only had never an enemy; but every hunting man—as during his army career every soldier—who came across him learned to think and speak of him as a genial, kindly-hearted companion, an enthusiastic and thorough sportsman. No man was more widely known; no man could be more widely and truly regretted. His memory will be sorrowfully cherished while our generation survives.

That love of hunting is still a very strong feature of the city of Leicester and its immediate vicinity, will readily be believed. Birth, tradition and education combine to maintain the feeling, in spite of the business instincts and vast manufacturing growth developed by the county-town during the last ten or fifteen years. Previous to that, Leicester was, if not a hunting-centre, nothing at all. Lord Gardiner and his comrades made the Bell at Leicester almost as well-known as the Old Club at Melton. Now, people who live there hunt—though they are by no means invariably the men whose income is of Leicester-make or Leicester-proportion. But no one any longer comes there for the pure object of fox hunting—any more than fifty years ago they would have come to make a fortune by means of elastic web. *Tempora mutantur*—but it is not a bad sign that a score or so of men can turn out at dawn, and wend their way through miles of houses to join the Quorn before breakfast hour. Thus on Friday, Oct. 6th, there was quite a field—to see the preliminary cub killed at the Barkby Hall Spinnies, and to join in the after-fun, though visiting sportsmen, like the woodcock, seldom appear in any quantity till after the first north-east wind in November.

Barkby Thorpe Spinney is only a mile or so away, forming one of a series of little copses. Under recent management and improvement it has now arrived at about three acres of densest covert; and, what is better, has become the nest of a numerous and promising family. *Holloa-away* and *tallyho-back*—the changes rung and repeated—foxes out and foxes still in. The latter form the chief employment in October—if a goodly November is to be provided. But hounds shortly dashed out and away with a third one—while other frightened cubs still ran here and there, barely escaping destruction at the mouths of the stragglers hurrying up to the cry. Twixt Barkby Village and Barkby Holt are small grass fields and strong fences every hundred yards. To be among these in February would be a pleasant excitement—in October there was all the excitement, with the pleasure discounted fifty per cent. by the demon that

was incorporated by the Greeks as Phobos—that the Latins deemed a satellite of Mars (a jackal, as it were, to the lion)—and that classic Englishmen term “funk.” The instinct of self preservation is, whether actively or passively shown, an agent altogether too potent in the direction of man’s adventure. It baulks him often when he might be almost brilliant, it checks him when he would soar, it takes nothing for granted—and least of all does it encourage a leap in the dark. A strong or enthusiastic spirit, or a powerful ambition, may help him to assault and overcome a patent source of terror—or, let us bring the abstract down to technical reality, might brace a coward (and are we not *all* more or less cowards—too often the former degree?) to face a sturdy fence perfectly hateful in its aspect, yet plain and measurable to the eye. But the instinct asserts itself at once with tremendous force, if asked to sanction a charge against a tall screen of green leaf—with a ditch lurking somewhere on the near side, and perhaps a pond, possibly an oxrail, on the other. Oh no—not unless somebody has gone first. Then *proh-pudor!* I’m a gallant man at once. It’s only a shallow wall of twigs.

For a bare ten minutes lasted the trial between anxiety and resolution—the fight between ardour and discrimination. Men helped each other on somehow; and the music of the constantly vanishing pack lent a strong stimulus. The big little places were all jumped in safety; and the party, after a semicircle of vague but rapid wandering, regained the park of Barkby Hall.

THE INITIAL BURST.

THE first gallop of the Quorn season was on Friday, Oct. 6—an hour’s run over the grass—a good pace—and a point of five miles over a perfect country. The morning was damp, dull, and autumnal; the two previous days had been given to unceasing rain; and ground was wet as pulp on the top, though still firm and sound under the turf.

Quenby Hall is this year a deserted mansion—Lord

Manners being quartered in Ireland, and no one else having yet come forward to take it. (By the way, the fine old Hall is no longer isolated from civilisation—for the Great Northern have planted a station within half a mile of its door.) Below the great quaint building slopes its park, and along the bottom of the park runs a narrow plantation. It was no cub that now dashed through the pack and darted along the hedgeside of the spinney (as if steering for Lord Moreton's Covert)—but a fine old fox, whose clean bushy plumage was finished off with a lusty white tag. The ladies were soon bustling on his track—for a little schooling in the open now—and the field of fifty set off to ride alongside, by the way they had come. Two wide ridge-and-furrow pastures—the furrows scarcely distinguishable amid the waving grass. Rabbit holes there were known to be, or supposed to be—and imagination is very vivid in the first few minutes of a run. Hardihood is not a natural plant—but the warmth of action forces it with a mushroom growth. Imaginary perils safely passed will often imbue courage to face others that are almost real. A half-mile rough gallop and a little rail and ditch were an encouraging introduction to all that was to follow. The whip had turned the fox over the hillside; and gaily, noisily, the pack passed out after him through the eastern gate of Quenby Park. Some moments of indecision then ensued, as to who should bell the cat, and break a way through the bullfinch bordering the road—before the country was fairly entered and a sharp quick course struck for Loseby Hall. Hounds well in front; and plenty of gates for which to diverge and scheme. Now we are all blocked in a corner—and 'tis almost a satisfaction to find that even all the thrusters of early spring time could not have found a way out here—through plantation, oxe, and ravine. So back by the previous gate, and round in follow-my-leader style again. "All right, sir—it's only a drop. Look like a deep bottom"—but a horse jumping to clear every leaf is scarcely going in form for a drop, and it seems a week before he lands with a clatter of hind against fore shoe.

At Loseby Spinney the old fox changed his mind; and turned abruptly back across our faces—fox, field and pack being again in the same meadow. Back to Quenby Park and Spinney almost by the same line, then out at once towards The Coplow. Headed from this, he bore to the right towards Ingarsby, and now made his mind up for a point in Sir Bache Cunard's country. The ground—if not actually severe—was fully deep for the month of October, and for horses only just from the clipping machine. But Leicestershire has this advantage (*among others*, on which it arrogantly hugs itself), that rain runs off its hills and undulations almost as it falls, and it is one of the last countries to become really heavy. So, though foam gathered and pipes played loudly, horses were still able to gallop and jump freely—and a sudden turn gave them two minutes of invaluable breathing time. As Mr. Carver's Spinney was passed, bold Reynard was to be viewed across the next valley—stealing up a hedgerow, with his head turned over his shoulder and his brush drooping low. The pack had to make a detour, while horsemen could stand still and welcome the delay. Over the hill towards Houghton—two ploughed fields (almost the only ones in the run) causing a momentary drag—five and thirty minutes now since the start. The Uppingham turnpike was crossed close to Houghton Village. "He can't travel very fast," said the shepherd, as he unlocked a gate off the road and ushered us on to the cream of Sir Bache's territory. Stiff enough at any time, it offered a prospect less than tempting after forty minutes' fast going in October. "Don't think we can get over this country now: my horse is half-beat already," quoth the one man from whom hounds *never* run away (the Widmerpool instance of last season save and excepted). But he did get over it; so did the Master; so did Captain O'Neal (who has resuscitated with unbroken nerve and a new stud); and so did Mr. Martin, Mr. J. Cradock, Mr. Johnson of Leicester, and one or two others—while Mr. Carver and his mare, an evergreen pair, worked round and about, and seemed ever present at each

point of the run. The fences were blind, no doubt—*very* blind. But they were big and fair, and horses rose at them to jump as far as they could. In reality they were always very much smaller than they appeared. They looked like green walls, where often they were weak impositions—and if they now and then happened to be the contrary, no strong binders were visible to the timid eye. There was no real check till near the Houghton Spinnies, when the pack suddenly found themselves surrounded and baffled by herds of cattle. The run had then lasted exactly an hour; and the old fox beat them—probability pointing strongly to his having hidden himself in one of the wide overgrown ditches.

KNEEDEEP ALREADY.

Friday, October 20th, brought out a glaring sunshine to succeed days of gloom and wet; and gathered a throng—almost a field—to see the Quorn work Barkby Holt. Not one fox, but a dozen or more furnished occupation in turn. Hounds stole away with the first flier, and drove him for some minutes across the grass for Scraftoft, before they were stopped. After this, each fresh-found member of the community was sent on his way; and finally the last one was fairly worked to death in covert in the interests of education. Barkby Holt is a square wood of just such a size and make as a fox-covert should be—some fifty acres of brambly undergrowth, warm and dry. It is big enough to prevent even a Leicestershire field from entirely surrounding it; while yet a huntsman can stand in the middle and keep every corner within earshot. He is not likely to be troubled with much company as he pounds about the inner rides; for they are almost knee-deep in yellow clay, and, if avoided while men are clad in the neutral tints of October, what will they be when the leaves are off and leathers are on? Far be it, though, from me to hint that any thought of appearance will, after the rendezvous-parade has once been dismissed,

weigh with—well, more than two of the three hundred sportsmen usually composing a field in the Shires. They will all brave mud and dishevelment, when they are obliged. But not a little of that acumen which enables them to be left behind three times out of four at Barkby Holt and similar deep-ridged coverts, is due less to their estimate of probabilities or their knowledge of woodcraft than to the fact that they don't see the fun of being splashed and bedaubed before a fox is even found. Why should they? Not for my pleasure nor for yours do they go a' foxhunting. Not every one of them gnashes his teeth, or makes himself unpleasant for the day to all with whom he comes in contact, because he has thus been left behind. If a run has been enacted, it does not leave him on one verge or other of insanity—either rabid with delight over what he has seen and shared, or frantic with rage and shame in that he has missed the chance. No, he maintains “a sane mind in a whole body” by abstaining from rash endeavours or undue excitement. He enjoys every moment of the day—or goes home as soon as it begins to bore him—has an amiable smile and a good story for everybody (especially, I notice, just as hounds find their fox), is a pleasanter companion at dinner—and can give a much more reliable account of the day's sport—than young Thruster, who is incoherent with sparkling delight over having “cut out the work,” or who is striving dismally to drown the memory of having taken a wrong turn and been thrown “clean out of it.” Wisdom and complacency—or a strong mania and a hot enthusiasm. Which should be a foxhunter's birthright? Which are embodied in Mr. Bromley-Davenport's stirring lines,

O glory of youth, consolation of age!
Sublimest of ecstasies under the sun!

On Tuesday and Wednesday of the present week Leicestershire may be said to have lived under water. Every ditch was a flooded stream, every grassy furrow was like a snipe marsh, every valley was a lake. Snow fell heavily on Tuesday; and was still to be seen lying crisp under the green hedges, when

the Quorn came to Ashby Pastures on Thursday (Oct. 26). Cold frosty nights have bidden the comet welcome ; but, even with the help of snow and rain, have done little to crush the grass in the ditches or the leaf on the thorn. The excessive blindness of the country becomes more apparent every time one rides—and is certainly brought more fully home by every cropper that falls to one's share. Old horses are apt to be "too clever by half;" young ones are rash and careless when they think there is little to jump—and yet, we who steer them, obeying an instinct that grows more powerful year by year, invariably ride for the weakest—now the most dangerous—part of the fence. A large majority of our erst companions would seem to solve the difficulty by staying at home or staying away. But if they wait till the fences are as they, and we, could wish them, they will remain away till Christmas, so abnormal and overwhelming has been the growth of grass and weed and bramble during the summer past. Ample opportunity was given us to-day of verifying this, as we scrambled through a little gallop from Ashby Pastures. The hounds had been nearly an hour behind time (a van having to be employed in conveying them through the flood near the Kennels); and then they had toiled hard amid the tangled undergrowth of The Pastures for nearly two hours more—foxes in all directions, but scent never sufficient for five minutes' strong pressure. The field meanwhile sunned themselves in the road ; or in a few instances plunged and floundered about the wet rides, till their horses had done nearly a day's work. But when at length a start was achieved, the muddy ones had the best chance of seeing the ball rolling—as it did rather cheerily for the first dozen minutes. From the Pastures to Kirby Village was the line—a straight and pretty one of some twenty minutes in all. The hedges were mostly weak and low ; and grass, growing through the thorn and on either bank of the ditch, left the diameter so vague and incomprehensible that one's only prayer was that the beast bestridden would take off well before he reached the fence apparent and then jump as far as he could.

We quickened his apprehension with cold steel; and we appealed to his after-feelings with hot words and a lusty malacca. But, for all that, he would hold to the delusion that grass meant turf, and that apparent substance need never represent empty space. In several instances the actual void made room for solid horseflesh; and in a small multitude of cases the hidden ditch only revealed itself when probed in unwilling discovery. But when the pace serves, a struggle counts for nothing: an escape is a triumph. It is only when a crowd comes up for single execution in turn that real timidity asserts itself in its most hideous shape. Teeth drawn one by one is the only equivalent to fall after fall while you wait your turn. They are the truly brave, the iron-nerved, who can submit to this *always*. With many—truer cowards may be—their hair would grow grey and all their joy and fun be gone, had they watched the peril every day instead of, when possible, leaving at least some of it behind them. In this brief gallop Leicester and agriculture did most to lessen all terrors by a jaunty example and contempt—and the chief samplers were Mr. Hicks on a bobtailed chestnut, Mr. Wade on his smart brown, and Mr. Black on a five-year-old. The subject of the riding, and its cloudy, imaginary, difficulties dismissed, it has only to be added that in the midst of Kirby Village this fox hid himself in some nook above or underground.

ITS KIRBY GATE.

As time goes, each Kirby Gate may perhaps, be reckoned as one more wrinkle on the forehead, an extra-crop of grey hair, another stride towards age and another step from youth. Writer and reader never suppose each other old—the former because he finds youth indulgent, the latter because the topic of all light literature is almost always associated with youth. We are all young. Let us be young—as we are when toasting fox-hunting after Kirby Gate. Gout is for the morrow, low spirits

are for old age ; and failing nerve shows itself only in the morning. We have seen another Kirby Gate ; and old friends looked pleasant—and young. The same ceremony has, doubtless, been enacted at many an opening meet elsewhere during the past and present week—and a man never feels so youthful and capable as when he grips hands that have been open and unchangeable to him through years gone by.

“The rolling seasons pass away ;
And Time, untiring, waves his wing.”

* * * * *

“What fears, what anxious hopes attend the chase !
Ah, happy days ! too happy to endure.”

Who was there ? is invariably the leading question in reference to Kirby Gate. Below is a rough list of gentle names, in reply. Who was *not* there ? is always the next query—to be answered in sadness and regret. The kindly old Earl and Capt. Hartopp (the friend and boon companion of all of us) are the names that rise first on the lips. Beside these there were many other absentees ; but, though we could wish them present, no melancholy fate has prevented or postponed their coming. Mr. Little-Gilmour does not often miss the opening meet. But neither he nor Col. Forester (the two oldest Meltonians) put in an appearance to-day. The octogenarian of the field was the Rev. Mr. Bullen of Eastwell—looking as firm and happy in his saddle as ever. If I mistake not, his years already number eighty-seven ; he began hunting eighty years ago ; and he broke his collarbone when fourteen. Had his well-known contemporary, the Rev. John Russell of Devonshire, been also present—as was, till a few days ago, expected—the meeting of two such pillars of our old established church would in itself have been an event worth witnessing.

The following represent some portion of the field assembled : Mr. Coupland, the Duke of Portland, Lord Newark, Count Kinsky, Sir Frederick Fowke, Mr. and Mrs. Adair, Capt. and Mrs. Molyneux, Capt. and Mrs. Ashton, Mrs. Sloane Stanley, Mr. and Miss Chaplin, Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Clifford Chaplin,

Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Story, Mrs. Langmore, Major and Miss Starkie, Mr. and Mrs. Whitworth, Col. Chippendall, Major Stirling, Major Robertson, Capts. Boyce, Barclay, Hill Trevor, Grimston, Stephen, Campbell, Whitmore, Goodchild, O'Neal, Jacobson ; Revs. Bullen and Trower ; Messrs. Farnham (2), A. Brocklehurst, Deschamps (2), Hume, Martin (2), Knowles, Praed, Lubbock, Parker, Brand, H. Campbell, Ernest Chaplin, A. C. Barclay, H. T. Barclay, J. Cradock, Cheney, Peake, L. Duncan, Pennington, O. Paget, Fletcher, Bankart, Custance, Winter Johnson, Morley, Black (2), Moule, Fox, Gleadow, and the Butcher in Blue.

No falling off, certainly, was there in the matter of carriages, and vehicles of all sorts imaginable and unimaginable. They come by the score to make the scene what it is year by year—a crowd at the meet (a quarter admirable, three-quarters admissible) ; a big procession from Kirby Gate to Gartree Hill, and a gradual dispersion to luncheon and the four winds. It is with the men and women who came to hunt that we have to do. At the last moment they dropped in—in many cases as mere pleasing afterthoughts, unexpected and heartily welcomed. Some from Ireland ; some from Norfolk ; more from London—most of them intending to work out six days hunting on a frame unprepared and a skin uninured. Will they do it ? “How will they do it ?” And this for pleasure !

Hearty greetings exchanged, new coats admired, new horses extolled by owners and approved by amiable friends—away to Gartree Hill. One cheer in covert, and then the unwelcome rumble o'er a fox killed asleep. Next a fox away, over the same meadow on the Burton side that year by year brings us forth for our first formal splutter. Now comes our chance of trying our new mounts—three hundred guineas in the dealer's books, or fifty pound ready out of the plough. New coats, new hats, new saddles—croppers a certainty. The last purchase is a clinker—up to now. Unpleasant discoveries develop themselves fence after fence, as we struggle onwards to Burton

Lazars—the fences big and blind, and the plough as deep as high farming and recent rains can make it. The local Marquis of Carabas has added a second ditch to many fences that were already quite wide enough for our requirements—and the said new purchases are soon galloping about riderless in all directions.



Thus for five minutes; and in ten more back to Gartree Hill, where the throng on the hillside is shouting heartily, and the "scarlet runner" hurrying down to meet the huntsman. "Was his head towards the covert when you saw him, Pat?" "Well, not aperiently, Mither Firr," replied our well known Chief of the Intelligence Department, scratching his own round nob thoughtfully—and with this lucid information the huntsman had to be content. In covert however, the latter got on to his fox, or another; and soon pushed him out for little Dalby. All who have hunted here—weighing over ten stone—know pretty well the sprightliness of cantering a fat horse up this picturesque slope; so I need not descant upon that.

But it was a trifle light as air compared with the ascent of

Burrough Hill immediately beyond. Hounds had just pierced the contents of, and were leaving the Punchbowl as we reached the summit—in a state of heat, redness, and suffocation such as only a jump from summer clothing into full cold-and-air-proof hunting kit can engender, when aided by a warm still day and a hot horse. Fine weather nearly always attends on Kirby Gate; and so, nine times out of ten, does a run. And, whether as a matter of temperature or of want of condition, there is invariably more distress than apparent among horses and men than on any other day before March. Plenty of breathing-time could however be seized by those who chose to stand aloof, while the chase wended an intricate and dilatory way round Leesthorpe Hall and the ploughs beyond. But it was quite a different thing when the little spinnies of Whissendine were reached. Men, who for the previous half hour had been leisurely watching from the road, now suddenly woke to the fact that a new stimulus had been given to the proceedings; and buckled to for a ride. Whether a fresh fox, or a freshening scent, caused the change, it is impossible to say; but there was a forward rush at once. The Quorn lady pack had for long been puzzling out the line. Now they handed over all difficulties to their followers, bidding them keep pace if they could. In the valley below Ranksboro' there was breaking of timber and rolling about—enough for a week's sport. But in one unfortunate instance only did any serious damage accrue. This was in the case of Mr. Herbert Praed, whose ill-luck brought him the broken collarbone that annually and inevitably stigmatises a Kirby Gate day. Deep ground, and an hour and a half's work had begun to tell their tale; and hounds were considerably to the good as they rose the hill overlooking Oakham—though a dozen men, well-mounted and well be-spurred, were hard in pursuit. The riding honours of the day, I do not hesitate to assert, belong fairly to the Rector of Stonesby—a new comer and a true addition to Leicestershire. He would be, and was, with hounds throughout the day; and whenever a Gordian knot had to be cut, his was the ready knife to do it. The final half-hour of this long run was quite the

quickest and best of it; and, with a sweep to the right, brought us to Orton Park Wood. When it is added that, in the turnip field immediately adjoining the wood, no less than three fresh foxes jumped up almost among the pack—it will easily be believed that the run ended in confusion. Still, a two-hours' hunt and a six-mile point make no unworthy beginning to a Melton season.

But on Saturday, Nov. 4, the field in front of Leesthorpe Hall was gay as a garden in June, with the sheen of scarlet and the dazzle of snowy buckskin. It was truly a show meet of the Cottesmore; a bright scene and a charming gathering—bringing home vividly the pleasant fact that another season was fairly before us. Dalby Hall looked beautifully picturesque amid the particoloured foliage of the plantation surrounding it. Yellow oak leaf and dark green fir blended gorgeously with red and russet and every autumn tint—which even the recent gales have failed to destroy. Once more we stood on the Punchbowl rim; and once more we all dashed away over the top, aglow with the same merry mixture of excitement, flurry and fear. But a start effected is at once as soothing to excited hearts as placing a kettle on the hob is to the seething waters within. They may continue to flutter and fizz for a little while; but almost immediately settle down to and maintain a hot but steady temperature. Many an ardent spirit may be seen quaking in his leathers when a fox is first found, apparently as fearful of what may be coming, as when The Doctor's lictor used to warn him—*Jones minimus*—for the dread presence after morning school. But once settled in his stirrups after the first fence, the tremor disappears, the wild excitement gives place to staid, determined delight; and anxiety is neither on his face nor in his thoughts again for the day.

In a blustering wind we rode round and below the Punchbowl, and watched one of its many foxes killed. By the way, he who should have been chief executioner on such an occasion was absent through a curious accident. The new first whip, it seems, in an evil moment tried the experiment of tying a fox's head, wrong way uppermost, to his saddle. As he swung him-

self to descend, the dead fox's tusk laid his leg open from knee to thigh—necessitating a sewing operation, and the irksome possibility of being a month in kennel. There he is at present, to the loss of his master and the Hunt, and to his own mental and physical pain.

And on Saturday, the 11th, the Belvoir met at Goadby with a view to Melton Spinney—breaking the journey to that covert with a short ring from Old Hills, when the intensity which the technical term “blindness” can assume was not only vividly embodied in the rough fences between plough and plough, but was amply illustrated by horses madly carrying empty saddles they knew not whither, and swallowtails legging it ungracefully in pursuit. Assheton Smith once made the sweeping and unfeeling remark that “a man never looks such a fool as when running after his horse, and shouting to other people to catch him.” Had he said “never *feels* such a fool,” I might be with him. But, as a matter of fact, most of us are only too glad to roll away as far and fast as we can, when a young one knees a top binder or chances stiff timber. And, happily, men are always found courteous and kind enough to slip a whip through the runaway's reins, without enforcing the obligation upon the panting owner by an allusion to the absurdity of his position. For might not their own turn come at any moment? Truly, give-and-take is a precept as heartily practised as it is all needful amid the ups-and-downs of foxhunting. It so happens—accountably enough, too, under the circumstances of new or renovated studs and a country exceptionally blind—that falls have been particularly plentiful during the week past. Since the one accident alluded to in my last, these tumbles on to soft ground have served the purpose of renewing courage and reviving confidence rather than taken the form of catastrophe or hurt. Thus, when the evening of Saturday last arrived, there were few to complain of bruises or even stiffness—though a week's sudden and severe work had left palpable marks of weariness and over-exertion on many an usually bright eye and many a naturally rosy cheek.

THE THREE PACKS.

IN chequered weather variable sport—a brilliant scent now and then ; often again none at all. If on two days we could only saunter about livid and shivering in the cold, on three we had sport and warmth and exercise—leaving the balance well on our side. The ground gets deeper and more rotten day by day ; but Leicestershire is no worse treated in this respect than many of its neighbours. It pleads guilty to some little plough here and there ; and the rain has deeply soaked its valleys. But it is not all plough ; it is not all vale ; and it meekly folds its hands in gratitude.

Material enough for a column of its own was furnished by the Quorn Friday of Nov. 17—in a fine gallop of three-quarters of an hour, followed by two more hours of almost incessant running. The day was cold, clear, and bright, in keeping with a coming frost ; and some of the nicest riding ground in the Quorn country was the scene of the sport. The first run was straight enough for all requirements, and the earlier half of it quite brilliant. The second event was a double ring ; but a ring sufficiently wide and good to deserve the appreciation which it obviously met. In fact, Friday was the best day for scent and sport that the winter of '82 has yet produced, in the Melton district.

The meet at Rearsby, and a find at noon. Brooksby Spinney—a humble concoction of a few dead sticks and artificial earth—supplied the latter. The Master sent a whip on to crack his lash beside the little covert ; and a big yellow fox was well afoot before he could be surrounded by the bustling pack. A November field is not a large one—even in the Leicester district. But the two little handgates below the spinney were scarcely enough for the flood that pressed them to choking, as the halloo-away cut through the crisp, keen air. Over the rough wide pasture above, where the shepherd was waving his hat and pointing in a direction which has no strong covert and scarcely a ploughed field for miles. None too readily did the hounds seem to grip

the line in the first few hundred yards. But it was excitement only—not “a want of scent,” as a dozen pair of lips at once framed it. For in the second field the pack buckled to their work, and could drive their fox as fast as they could get over the grass and through the fences. To the right of Gaddesby village is the prettiest going. Every hedge has its easy places; and easy swinging gates also help to speed the galloper. Below the village is the Gaddesby Brook—a stream that is more easily forded than jumped. As hounds and field rushed down upon its bank, a fresh fox rushed through their very midst, and caused the *contretemps* of the day. Half the pack jumped at him as he passed, and went away to the left at his brush. The other half bore to the right—down-stream; at the same moment Firr caught a view of their fox before them, and verified him as the one with which they had started. But the division took place so instantly, and was so little realised that, unless you happened to be pinning all your faith, and looking for guidance, to the huntsman’s cap, it was mere accident which section of the pack caught your eye. “A cub, no doubt, and they’ve run him into view”—was the obvious argument which carried off the Master, with such good attendants as Messrs. W. Gosling, B. Lubbock, Parker, Peake, Hume, the Duke of Portland, Mr. and Mrs. Adair, Mrs. F. Sloane-Stanley, Col. Chippindall, Capt. Grimstone, O’Neal, and others. In the huntsman’s train rode Capts. Smith, Barclay, Starkie, Goodchild, Hili-Trevor, and Henry, Miss Constable, Count Kinsky, Mons. Deschamps, Messrs. A. Brocklehurst, Cecil Chaplin, Behrens, H. T. Barclay, Mr. H., with Mrs. and Miss Story, &c., while Capt. Boyce, at first jumping over the fence to the left, immediately discovered and rectified his mistake. (I hope I may be pardoned for making a more than ordinary free use of names to adorn my little tale?) The former party galloped heartily up to South Croxton village; and only discovered the situation when, at the end of what their spokesman afterwards described as a capital twenty—to twenty-five—minutes’ burst, they found themselves at a check, in the poor allotments. The others were able to make a much better

story out of their adventures and achievements, and they told it somehow thus—that, after fording the Gaddesby Brook, they were called upon to ride the country foot-path that leads to Queniboro'; that such foot-paths, with their greasy stiles, are best avoided, but that the high strong hedges on either hand left them no choice. Yet the worthy sportsman whose four-year-old rolled over a rabbit hole, leaving him to take the whole succession on foot, and in orthodoxy, negotiated them with no more comfort than did his comrades. The four-year-old alone extracted boundless fun out of them, taking each in irreproachable form, seizing his turn without jostling, though resolutely declining to be caught for miles. By that time weight carriers were beginning to pant and tire; and narrator assured me it was only excess of delicacy and a superhuman effort of self control that prevented his claiming the runaway, and in exchange leaving his own pumped-out machine tied to a gateway. I leave it to the public to determine if he would have been right. The end would surely have justified the deed, would it not? But then, as the opportunity came only just before the Queniboro' Brook, would he have dared to ride the runaway at the water, and risked the fate of Mr. Brocklehurst and Mr. V. H. Barclay—or, meeting it, to have awaited the coming of the strong stranger in boots? The maxim of riding your friend's horse as you would your own might scarcely have been found to apply, if the friend—totally unprepared—had come upon the apple of his eye cast in the rushes, or only held up from drowning by his new bridle. The Queniboro' Brook is another of those deep-cut and erratic streams that ruin our waterjumping in Leicestershire. Here was an instance in point. Capt. Smith struck it where the most resolute of chesnuts that ever looked through a combination of bridles could not possibly have got half way over; Count Kinsky swept it in a big place; Mons. Deschamps glided blandly over an extravagant one—the rest trotted through, a few yards away. Fences continued thickly for a quarter of a mile; then gave way to gates and gaps till three-and-twenty minutes had been scored, and near Barkby

Grange a momentary, very welcome, check was reached. Then round Barkby Holt—a single field beyond the covert—and to ground at Baggrave. Forty-seven minutes from the start.

The joined forces had just time to warm over their comparative stories and to cool in the north-easterly breeze, before a find at Queniboro' Spinney set them going again, and bade them jump and gallop in company to their hearts' content. I will not weary with detail of all that was done during the next two hours. A double ring, fast and full of incident, took them over much of the ground of the morning—and even led to jumping some few fences for a third time in the day. It led also to the discovery that many of the Queniboro' fences are beyond not only the heart of man but the power of horse: and in the first quarter of an hour a hardriding field was more than once utterly tied up. After working clear of this uncompromising region, the pack made capital of a sterling scent to drive twice through Barkby Holt, and to work a wide detour over country where riding was all a pleasure. Mr. Cecil Chaplin, whose eye to hounds is happily by no means dimmed by recent illness, was seeking new strength in the genial warmth of the chase. The Count,* ably emulated by a fellow spirit in close attendance, was striving hard to find a fence big enough for the smartest of his smart chesnuts—and at length took the measure of one that would nearly do. The Quorn hounds never shone to brighter, more admirable, advantage—and altogether everybody enjoyed himself and herself (Miss Constable will, I trust, pardon my taking her as a type of the latter for the day). Even the huntsman—to whom it must have been a sore trial to find a fresh fox in front of hounds at South Croxton village, just as they seemed running for blood—apparently sank all his disappointment, in the knowledge of the sport, of which it is no flattery to say that, by his faultless handling, he had been the chief promoter.

On Tuesday, Nov. 21, the Cottessmore were at Knossington; and, after running round and about Ranksboro' all morning,

* Count C. Kinsky.

marked the afternoon with a half-hour's burst of tremendous pace. It was a gallop of a character altogether different to that of Friday above, or of Wednesday (with the Belvoir) to follow—the three runs being very characteristic of their respective countries. The Cottosmore after the first five minutes (from Lady Wood), released themselves from small inclosures and the interference of sheep and bullocks—then went like wildfire over their great sweeping hills and wide well-gated grass fields till they had burst their fox and horses too. At Braunston Village they turned so short to the left that nine-tenths of their hard-riding followers overshot the mark and could never get to them again. Mr. Baird and Mr. Tailby were well on the inside; riding in a position suitable to their status and antecedents. On the right flank were the huntsman with Downs, Mr. Beaumont, Col. Gosling, and one or two others—and so thus, with hounds well in front, they went past the left of Oakham to the rough rushy hillside above Langham, known I believe as Langham Pasture. Here their fox was so blown (twenty minutes from the start) that he turned back almost in their face, and crept into a willow-strip in the outskirts of Oakham town—the pack at his very brush. There was actually, even in such a spot, a fresh fox to relieve him; and, as luck would have it, they went on with the new comer, so losing the blood they had fairly earned. Much of the ground over which they ran has been recently drained, and showed a wonderful improvement upon previous years. There were out to-day Mr. W. Baird, Sir Bache and the Misses Cunard, Capt. and Mrs. Blair, Mr. and Mrs. G. Baird, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Chaplin, Col. and Miss Palmer, Capt. and Miss Starkie, Mrs. F. Sloane-Stanley, Mrs. Clayton, the Misses Hopwood, Duke of Portland, Mr. Tailby, Colonels Gosling and Percy, Capts. Ashton, Boyce, Jacobson, Smith, Featherstonhaugh, Stephen, Messrs. Westley-Richards, Tryon Dawson, Fludyer, W. Finch, F. and W. Gosling, Cochrane, Marshall, S. Hunt, Hanbury, Newton, Beaumont, Peake, Adair, Parker, Lubbock, Behrens, Custance, Whitworth—and twice as many more.

CATCH 'EM WHO CAN.

THE Hoby lordship again—to a merry tune, if not a lengthy one—and this on the afternoon of Monday last, November 27, a brief and pleasant prelude to the wild tempest that closed the day. The Quorn had met at Ratcliff-on-the-Wreake, and had already hugely edified and amused a strong concourse of cotton-spinners, shoemakers and men of like profession who dearly love a day on foot with the home pack—running a fox for an hour and a half round Cossington Gorse, and killing him in the village of Thrussington. In proof of the preference of foxes for a quiet corner in the open, as against the recognized insecurity of a covert regularly visited by hounds, Cossington Gorse had been drawn blank, when a fox was turned out of his usual kennel in a hayrick close by. And again, when an hour later they brought him back to the covert, no less than three foxes had now congregated there. Little scent had there been ; but of this little the most was made. The dog pack worked hard—and so did the footpeople as useful skirmishers.

When Thrussington Gorse was reached about 2.30 in the afternoon, prospects were anything but bright. The clear sky of the morning was now overcast with black scudding clouds ; the wind blew half a gale ; and we could not but remember that the Gorse thus far in the season had been blank. But we did not all know that the earths in the Hoby pastures hard by, where Mr. Barford-Henton and his good neighbours had so carefully guarded two litters of cubs during the summer, had now been smoked and stopped, and the occupants driven off to the coverts. Let me suppose you do not all happen to be as intimate with the neighbourhood as the writer. Thrussington New Covert, as it is still called—though I see by an old map that it existed even in Sir Harry Goodrich's time, under the title of the Manor Covert—stands by the side of the old Fosse Road a quarter of a mile from the crossroads of Six Hills, and has the wood of Thrussington Wolds to back it up a field away. The gorse is still only kneedeep after the double treatment of

fire and frost: and Firr was soon able to spot a fox dodging about it. A quiet *tallyho* brought hounds into play in a moment; and immediately afterwards the huntsman was in the Fosse, viewing his fox away to Six Hills. The whips were guarding other quarters of the covert; and he had to depend on his own exertions to stop the one couple which alone came down the wind on the line. Riding back to the covert-side, he yet found no response to horn or voice; it was obvious at once that something must be amiss; and without loss of a moment Master and man set to work to solve the enigma by cutting in between the gorse and the wood. A whip came galloping up to tell what already seemed a horrid certainty—viz., that the body of the pack were away on another fox. A bystander confirmed the news, pointing towards the Wolds—but neither one nor the other informant was ready with more than the vaguest information. A plunge in the dark into the depths of even fifty acres of woodland clay would have been a rash move on such hypotheses. Better by far to make safe the grass side, and at least ensure not missing a chance of the best direction. A little bridle gate that would hold a field for a quarter of an hour was an easy patent slip to half a dozen men bent on helping each other. Now, where are hounds? Big D, little D, Saxon tongue and Leicestershire lingo; pretty manners and shocking mutterings. *There they go!* A quarter of a mile away—and not a sinner with them—as, I pledge my spurs, I have viewed them time after time disappearing from Thrussington Wolds. But is it not splendid ground over which to catch them—where you have only to drop into one field to find a way out directly before you, where a horse wants but a turn of speed and to have been taught to jump a hurdle? The Ragdale fences are meet for a galloping hack; though, stretching down to the lower level of the Wreake, come the rich feeding grounds and sturdy fences of the Hoby Lordship. Passing to the right of Ragdale Hall, it was riding all in the dark—one hedgerow closely masking the next, and only the instinct of direction, and the desperate necessity of the situation, giving men any

clue in their blind ride. Hounds must be *somewhere*; and the earliest gallopers were now in a position to scan the slope in front and to the left. Not the white gleam of a hound's back, nor the wave of a stern, to catch the straining eye. Bending to the right, the horsemen crossed the brow—and there, immediately beneath them, was the pack, just recovering from an entanglement with a frightened herd of bullocks. Two farmers, Mr. Marshall and Mr. Henton, jun., were the first to reach the hounds, and the closest to keep with them—as they sped over the good grazing farm whereon the fox, and the latter gentleman, were both bred, and were both now doing credit to themselves. Nor was familiarity with the fields and gates of any great assistance to ease the way—for the line of the chase was by no means one the rider would choose in a quiet morning's shepherding. Reynard, having found his birth-place closed against him, and having journeyed so far down a strong breeze, had nothing for it but to go on whether he liked or not. For, though there might be no point for him in front, his foes were too close to him upon the wind to allow of his turning back. So, as with the Walton Thorns fox, in the final run of last season and over the same ground, he held forward over the open country in a purposeless fashion past the left of Hoby. To the clump of trees that form so prominent a landmark between that village and Ashfordby, was twenty minutes. And here came the first delay, under rain and rainbow—followed ten minutes later, as they neared Ashfordby, by a complete collapse, in a storm of hail and snow and wind that nearly swept men from their saddles. But for this wild tempest, the run might have taken high rank—for hounds were on capital terms with their fox, and he was already driven far from any shelter.

A RECESS.

Tuesday, December 5.—We woke to find the vale of the Wreake white with snow; but thought but little of it as from

the breakfast table we watched the green grass slowly reappearing to view. The Cottessmore had advertised for Owston Wood ; and well as we know that those deep deep rides were this season more fathomless than ever, we had looked forward only too hopefully to this, the best fixture—for the best field—of the week. Snow had quickly come and gone before ; was going rapidly now ; and hope was still well alive when the galloping hack had shivered his ten customary minutes at the door. Gaily he splashed southward, while we glanced complacently at the powdered greensward, and carelessly at the black storm clouds gathering northward. Not for a moment did it recur, to a mind too shallow to assimilate a perspective deeper than optimism, that Owston belonged to the same lofty level as Burrough and Somerby—places bearing about the same relative temperature to Leicester and Melton as the hill quarters of Simla and Ootacamund to Calcutta and Madras. The Quorn plains were now barely streaked with white ; the Burton Flat was almost warm ; the Stapleford neighbourhood was absolutely green. But we rose to Somerby to find the snow balling perilously in horses' feet, the turf covered three inches deep—and a cold misty atmosphere welcoming us heavenward. Underfoot and overhead matters grew worse and worse as we neared Owston Wood—sauntering leisurely under the thought that if hunting was to take place at all, it must be on the lower ground or after midday. But, punctual to their destiny, hounds were already in the wood ; and presently were to be met working their way from west to east—while a very limited and chilled escort skirmished parallel with them, ploughing through the great dark covert, or slipping about like cats on walnutshells in the snow outside. A cold wet drizzle gradually systematised itself into a dark driving snowstorm ; and the miserable aspect of the sky found its reflex on faces that had hitherto contrived to maintain much of their brightness and bravery. The better sex came far more creditably through the ordeal. Men looked blue with cold, black with misery, and stayed on till all hope and feeling was gone. Women grew pinker, and to all appear-

ance merrier, under the pelting storm, for a while—then turned and galloped off home, leaving their lords to suffer on principle, to be miserable out of choice.

A holloa came back from the heart of the wood; and thither we plunged, and there we roamed for an hour and a half. "The merrie green wood for me!" How it sucked, and splashed and held! How the poor horse was now on his head, and now pulled on his haunches—his hocks fast under mud and water! Tell me, how was Robin Hood shod, think you, in a winter like this? We can scarcely give him credit for either porpoise-hide or fishing waders; and sandals, besides being but indifferent protection against stubbs and thorns, would probably be found even less conducive to warmth than the top boots out of which we painfully wriggle our numbed feet at each return from hunting. Woollen stockings or silk; loose boots or natty ones; long limbs or short—it seems all the same this chilly unsporting winter. Daily have we listened to multiplied groanings on the subject, from Spartan youths too who would put up almost unmurmuringly with a fox gnawing at their vitals—were it only in furtherance of sport—but who are plaintive nearly to tears over the biting cold at their toes. Perhaps a kindly reader will contribute a remedy in the Query and Answer column of the *Field* and mitigate the misery of half-frozen foxhunters. Or is the only alternative to remove the cause—leathers tight beneath the knee, tops pressing close upon them, and no chance given to circulation? I am told, again, that *ankle muffatees* are the newest fashionable, and comfortable, item of masculine garb.

But nothing less than an Esquimaux's furs and leggings could have preserved any particle of warmth in the drenched frames that attempted to battle with the elements on Tuesday. At one o'clock it was thoroughly realised that hounds—apparently unable to run at all—were quite unlikely to meet the storm, or indeed move in any direction but towards the other woodlands, and accordingly the "Melton side" finally dispersed. All but half a dozen of the most determined, and interested, of

the Hunt had already done so ; and if the two or three who still persevered were rewarded with anything approaching a run—they fully deserved it.

Dec. 12th, 1882.—Frost. After a dozen winters' penmanship on the same congenial subject, there is at least no novelty in heading a hunting letter thus in the midst of snow and frost. Whether the common trial is easier to bear, the imprisonment less irksome, depends with all of us conversely upon how the individual has stood wear-and-tear, and, directly, how the ordeal finds him circumstanced at the moment. Some temperaments are like old silver—bright and fresh to the end. Others are plated with a thin veneer, that stands no knocking about, before laying bare the unsuitable metal within. The latter may stand a certain number of seasons, and even glitter quite as smartly as the solid material ; but it is not made for rough-and-tumble. Thus, if nerve and zest show any signs of wear and decay, it is astounding to mark the placidity with which the once keen foxhunter will accept the inevitable, and resign himself to a frost. He falls back at once with absolute pleasure upon a store of occupation which has accumulated while he wasted day after day in the pursuit of a mere duty at the covert-side. On the other hand, it is not to be expected of the most impressionable disposition that any man, more than a two-season hunter, or dependent upon regimental first or second leave, should succumb to a frost as if such a calamity had been reserved only for the being born under an unlucky star. Most of us have something else to do—or make pretence of having. If it be pleasant, here's the chance. If distasteful, let us get it over.

Our horses have done so little real work as yet, that the stoppage is not likely to be welcomed as a benefit to any stable—unless that stable be in a state of transition, or only very newly formed. The demand for hunters has been so strained and universal during the past two months, that to fill

up vacancies has been found a matter of almost insurmountable difficulty; and hence many new purchases have scarcely issued from the initiatory course of treatment to which grooms deem it invariably necessary to subject a fresh comer before he may be put to the test of the covert side. Up to present date the snow—arriving as it did, before the frost—has at least retained us the privilege of keeping horses in work; so you may get on the fresh comer's back and send him round the grass fields to your heart's content and his advantage. For the turf is well protected; and the snow serves not only to shield the ground from frost, but to bring every muscle of your horse into play as he gallops. Thus, a morning might be more unprofitably—and far less pleasantly—spent, than in opening in person the pipes and pores of your horses, that otherwise would only be doing their sheeted and hooded drudgery—at an hour when your own chief care is to keep your nose sufficiently under the bedclothes to avoid frost-bite. The strong sharp exercise arouses a sympathetic warmth of body and spirit, for which you will seek in vain from the sensation columns of the daily papers, or from an undue and ill-deserved luncheon. There is a keenness about the fog, as you rush through it, that sends a glow into veins declining to flow freely under inspiration of mere food and warmth: there is lively sympathy to be got—if startling and trying—from a new saddle and a horse that from sheer high spirits would gladly flick out of his skin.

Melton is of course virtually empty during this indefinite recess. Even in its gayest days it ever became so immediately hunting was stopped. That it has lost much of its greatness is evidenced by its society being less than half its old proportions. Consequently emptiness is much more readily and easily arrived at now than then. Why its attraction should fail to be as powerful now, is not easy to say. Melton is equally a concentric point for the best country of three notable packs of hounds as it was then, and as it is also now for the junction of the three great railways of the north. But if we look round we shall find that the other towns also entirely fail

to draw together a community, though to a certain extent they may attract individuals. Melton has a dozen hunting boxes to let, though quite an average number of men have been flitting backwards and forwards to the hotels—and these hunting boxes, if they ever recoup their sanguine owners at all, will probably have to do so through the medium of the town's increased commercial rather than sporting prosperity. But if Melton falls short of what it was, Market Harboro' shows a deficiency still more marked. Oakham has grown more popular, and Grantham in no degree depreciated; but both these have to go outside the town walls for most of their society. Rugby, again, is a come-and-go quarter making no world of its own; and the same may be said of Weedon or any other town you may name, where foxhunting constitutes the sole object of visitors or settlers. And yet the hunting-fields of the Shires show no attenuation. On the contrary, they are lustier, and more redolent of life and money, every year. Whence then does everybody come? The explanation seems to me to point in the direction of increased domesticity on the part of the present generation. They are no less fond of hunting; but they are more attached to their own hearth. Perhaps they marry younger, and have been brought up on improved lines? As a matter of fact, they prefer to establish their Lares and Penates in a tamely way where there exists just one fellow-sportsman with whom to jog home at night, where chickens and an Alderney cow are the most exciting channels of dissipation, and where the grey-haired rector is the riskiest of company within hail. Has Melton ever done anything that it should be thus comparatively ostracised? And how is it that such a change has come over the method of men and women that now each hamlet has a dove's nest, while the big pigeoncote of former days is well-nigh empty.

Ah, there is comfort in hunting from home, luxury in untrammelled hours, and freedom in following your own bent, that, though tending possibly to selfishness and leading to old-

fogeyism, are ten times more in keeping with true enjoyment of sport and the maintenance of nerve and verve than all the pleasant excitement of competitive dinners and delightful company. And this is an opinion that would seem to be gaining ground day by day.

ONLOOKER ABROAD AND AT HOME.

THE Bicester country was new and pleasant ground that Brooksby essayed to break in company with former comrades and fresh acquaintance. But a pinion that is no use in the work of flight is not likely to bring any but a draggled quill to do its part with fact or fancy. As it happened, the sport, though very enjoyable, was scarcely that of a sample day, any more than the country crossed was the pick of the Bicester. Onlooker saw enough to bear out all he had heard. He could not but be struck with the effect so obviously produced by the last two seasons' prominent success. The light of sport can never be hid under a bushel; and the Bicester Hunt has acquired a fame that brings its own reward—in a field that rivals Leicestershire or Cheshire. Sixty or seventy horsemen were, I am told, wont to compose the field when the Bicester hounds were stealing their way into a stream of sport—and fame. Now the computation must be made in hundreds Bicester, Buckingham, Brackley, Banbury, Winslow, each is becoming a little metropolis. The characteristics of a country are not to be acquired in a day, or even in a week; but I think I am right in saying that there is far more room for a crowd with the Bicester than there is with either Quorn, Cottesmore, or Pytchley. For with the first, though the fences are often strong they are seldom totally unjumpable in all but a single place; and the flood of horsemen is not nearly so often pent in at gap or gate. I take it too—subject to all correction—that though you may be called upon to fall quite as often (up to Christmas twice as often) in the Bicester as in the other

countries named, you are likely to fall with much less disagreeable result to yourself and beast, for the reason that in very few districts are the blackthorn binders as strong or timber as stout and frequent. Add to these considerations that the grass of the Bicester generally carries a rare scent, and that the Hunt under present management (the Mastership of Lord Valentia) is in a rich vein of sport—it is little to be wondered at that a stream of popularity now flows sturdily in this direction. Fox-hunting indeed must be at the present day—do not let us say at its zenith, for that might infer an approaching decline—but in huge and universal favour; for no diversion or increase in any new direction would seem to affect in the slightest degree the stability or proportion of crowds where already established. No good pack, and no good country, can in fact limit itself nowadays to edifying the small circle of its original supporters. Every pack is looked upon as public property, every country as a public playground—and I fear the newspaper correspondents—whose name is now legion—have no little to answer for, that such is the case.

Well, Onlooker who went for a day's holiday with the Bicester (much, possibly, as a playactor invariably takes his recreation at a theatre), very quickly—and not altogether unnaturally—came to the conclusion that the Bicester grass rode a trifle deep; and, looking about him, he soon discovered that the natives and *habitués* also had evidently found that out, and had mounted themselves accordingly—for their horses, as a rule, were remarkable for strength and breeding. He noticed, too, that the hounds looked like going, and working, all day; for the lady pack was full of bone and power. He saw enough to verify for himself the widespread reports of Stovin, the huntsman's, patient and sterling capabilities; and he could not but be struck with the quick sharp system with which the whole staff helped hounds out of covert on their fox. The charming plurality of the habited fair was as evident as their prominence in pursuit. Allah be praised!—and yet it was said that fewer ladies than usual graced the field. That

they could amply hold their own, in this sphere, as in all others, with the rougher sex, was patent to-day and on the morrow. Two other, more abstract, points engraved themselves on the none too impressionable plate of Onlooker's understanding, to be reproduced for what they are worth—first, that “form will be served,” or, in other words, that in a “dart” over a country the proved men of a Hunt invariably come to the front; secondly (and I must be allowed to say it without offence), that when the country is easy, and a field is once roused, even the combination of a popular and determined Master and a quick huntsman will not suffice to keep the field off a pack of hounds—any more here than in certain other grass countries, to which over-riding hounds is supposed to be a special attribute. To illustrate the first, it is merely necessary to allude to the early scramble of the day from Poodle Gorse; whence Mr. George Drake and Mr. Harter went to the front like rockets. To prove the second, we have only to take the main run of the day—some forty-five minutes from Frinckford over and round the “Bicester Flat.” The latter is, perhaps, held the poorest section of the Bicester country—being chiefly light plough with very easy fences (exactly similar, in fact, to the Heath district of the Belvoir). With an indifferent, or at least broken-hearted, fox, there was more than a fair scent—and the public rode. A hundred men and women (and who shall blame them?) were all as well to the front as each other or the hounds—or more so. Yet it was a day of constant interest and amusement. And now, having ventured these, a stranger's comments, I need scarcely go back so far for further details of little interest.

While Tuesday was in every sense a perfect hunting day, Wednesday, Dec. 20, found the Duke of Grafton's meeting at Wicken in a cold thick fog. But, after trotting through it for a couple of miles, hounds were thrown into what, in the semi-darkness, may or may not have been an osier bed, close to the village of Deanshanger. So dense, indeed, was the mist that Onlooker only realised he was by a covert-side at all, through

his inability to find the pack among the horsemen clustering in the meadow. Suspicions once roused were soon verified by the sharp twang of Frank Beers' horn, and by the sudden flashing off into the darkness of the huntsman himself. From so tiny a covert there could be no need in waiting for every hound to be out—or the leading couples might slip away altogether in the fog. So, with horn going lustily, the huntsman drove along close to the head—every hound straining to be there. As the chesnut disappeared through the first tall bullfinch, there was at once a rush to reach the gap and to keep the pilot in sight. No easy matter, either, were it not for the tail-hounds hurrying on the line. For vision was limited to less than a hundred yards; and the pack, close on its fox, was racing furiously. Twixt river and canal—over a line of strongly fenced meadows—they were running towards Buckingham. Now a gate, then a flying fence—horses in their stride—hounds flickering in ghostly swiftness just ahead—your blood fully warmed—and the object of your life not to be unsighted or left behind. Two rustic forms suddenly looming in the darkness—waving and shouting as if to warn from a stone quarry. “Bear to your left! To your left!” Why? what? where? Strain as you will to pierce the fog, there is nothing to break the impalpable plain. Yes, now it is to be seen! A brook—its banks as level as the borders of a garden walk! It is only fifty yards in front. Horses are speeding along well in hand—and of course *every* horse in the county of Buckingham jumps water. Neither man nor horse can possibly stop now. And this is the sort of brook for which in other countries we so often yearn—flat, fair, and jumpable anywhere. Another second, and we shall be skying away across yonder field, singing under the breath, “He shook his lean head as he heard them go flop.” Oh, you brute! May you some day die of thirst! Here we are, a merry crew—five drenched and crestfallen competitors toiling up the opposite bank, and tugging their faithless steeds after them. The huntsman, meanwhile, has skimmed from bank to bank—Mr. H. Bourke on his strong white horse landing side

by side with him. Mr. Gerald Paget is over in their tracks; and so, if I mistake not, is the Master (Hon. G. Douglas Pennant), with scarce half a dozen more—among whom I must be allowed to name Mrs. Wiseman and Mrs. Byass. These are now in the thick of the fun and the thick of the fog. Hounds are scarcely discernible half a field away, as they speed at best pace over the deep grass.

Their fox being headed in a road, and driven back almost among them, puts them on still better terms—and with hackles up they set to work even thus early to race for his blood. Now he is to be seen toiling across the stubble field they have just entered; and it is easy now to mark poor Reynard as a certain victim to the repletion and excess of the recent frost. A nicely trimmed hedge, slightly uphill. Of course fast at it, with hounds running into their fox. The last stride, both spurs well

in—"Canal! Canal!" This time you may thank Heaven, sir, that your good mount will not face water! He sticks his toes into the bank as he lands on the towing path. Cling to his mane and wriggle back into the saddle—for the water is deep, and cold as this Christmas week. Oh dear, this is a very

perilous country!—and Onlooker felt heartily grateful that his lot was only to depict such dangerous scenes. By the help of a road running close parallel, he was able to be there at the finish, as quick as others; to witness a fat fox pulled down in his tracks after only thirteen bursting minutes. If the rest of the day was comparatively barren, Onlooker had still enough to carry away with him—not only in the memory of the morning's incidents, but in appreciation of hounds, men, and material. It would only be repeating what has been said and written so constantly of late years, if he were to make mark of the neat and workmanlike appearance of the staff and their mounts. The hounds had long been an object on which Onlooker had hoped to cast eyes. The ladies of the pack were out to-day, and more than fulfilled all his expectations—founded though they were on the encomiums of far better judges than himself. They are truly remarkable for fashion and in their work; and under Beers are as handy as spaniels, keen as terriers.

For the Friday immediately preceding Christmas the Quorn appointed Brooksby Hall—bringing thither a gathering typical and topical, of season and scene. By no means a good day's sport, there still was amusement for the multitude—and, truly, as one who loitered behind to see all, while doing as little as he could, narrator never witnessed more enthusiastic riding. The fences appeared not to be built that could prevent someone from putting them to the test, or others from following the lead till the whole strength of each impediment was levelled. Onlooker had often and often from sheer cowardice awaited such a consummation on previous occasions. Then it was with a sense of shame—a feeling possibly of nameless dread such as Moore alluded to—

There's something strange, I know not what,
Come o'er me.
Some phantom I've for ever got
Before me.

Now, on the contrary, he was able to hide all thought and

appearance of fear under the necessities of the situation ; and adapted himself to it very comfortably—succeeding generally in at length being able, without disgrace, to walk through a fence which others had broken down at the risk of their bones. He saw many feats of gallantry enacted—some under the spur of ambition, some under that of joyous lightheartedness, and a few under the impulse of necessity. But, whatever the motive power which actuated the leader of the movement, followers were sure to be found—and his place was forthwith made that of the ruck behind. Now it has always seemed to Onlooker that the most stringent test of nerve of all is to feel called upon to follow a man over a place he has chosen, which is much bigger than one you would have picked for yourself. You are no longer a voluntary agent. You have to run a risk merely because some bolder spirit than yourself lays it out for you. If he had not gone there, it would never have occurred to yourself or others that you showed the white feather. Now he has removed all chance of escape ; and out of respect for your self-esteem or your character you must needs follow. So it was with a sympathetic thrill that Onlooker constantly saw the example set, and saw it followed to distress by men in no way mounted for such feats. Gay Scatterbills would lark over “owdacious” timber faced by a deep wide ditch ; and his three-hundred guineas’ worth from a fashionable dealer would make light of the task. Young Gilesen, on a four-year-old whose only education has been acquired in the steady routine of shepherding and whose woolly coat has scarcely been off a month, is impelled by a heart quite as large as the aristocrat’s to do likewise. If the four-year-old rolls one way, and he the other, it’s the best luck he can expect. And even if the timber stands this trial, Gilesen’s nearest neighbour, or perhaps a *débutant* on a hireling, is sure to come forward to complete the task—and sooner or later a waggon might be driven through. Verily, if sheep were more noble animals and the suggested comparison were not likely to offend, I would ask if you had ever noticed the obstinate determination of a whole

flock to follow a single one that, probably for no reason whatever, has thought fit to shove himself through a gate or even a thick fence. Whatever may be the difficulties in the way, every one of those sheep will soon be after him.

May the New Year be one of Happiness to Foxhunters and to all but their enemies !

BOYHOOD.

Friday, Dec. 29.—The Quorn made Keyham their rendezvous, to complete the Old Year in their grass country. Keyham is eminently close to Leicester ; and so there was a handsome contingent of vehicles—about enough perhaps to have carried the commissariat of a small army corps. Indeed this was a function that, judging by many palpable evidences of efficiency in the art of provisioning, they could very admirably have fulfilled. Certainly their household cavalry of to-day ran no risk whatever of lengthened deprivation of food and drink. But besides these, there were two other elements—much more welcome, if I may be allowed to say it—largely represented in the concourse of the day, viz., the farmers and the schoolboys. The presence of the former in greatly improved numbers, points to better times, and to a relief from the pressure of ill-luck that has so long weighed them down. (Surely, if any class has its proper place in the hunting field, it is the farmers. They find the land, the subscribers find the money ; and thus, by mutual assistance and goodwill, is the truest of English sports maintained for a common advantage ; and the men whose interests are most likely to be identical have the best and pleasantest opportunity of meeting.) The presence of the latter in their exuberant enjoyment is in itself a fillip to natures more matured, that are perhaps a trifle rusted, too often a little crabbed. Every day's hunting is bliss to boyhood. Boyhood never goes home to growl about bad foxes or bad scent. Each day with hounds is to it a dip into the vista of manhood, independence, and holiday—privileges whose acquire-

ment we too often allow ourselves to value less day by day, year by year.

Monday's run with the same pack made a curious beginning to the New Year. Wartnaby Hall had been the meet, after just such a stormy night as had caused the last anniversary to reckon as the only blank day of a decade with the Quorn. The morning, however, wore a far pleasanter aspect, and I fancy no one will gainsay there was a scent. On the other hand, every second furrow was a canal, every other ditch an overflowing stream. Holwell Mouth and Welby Fishpond were both, alas! drawn blank; and a sorry pilgrimage went on till after midday. One funny little incident there happened by the way, sufficient, if not to divert the hungry mind, at least to tickle it for the moment. I have already noted that at this season boys are rife. This was a big boy; though the pony was very small. The former, though imbued with the most creditable ambition and courage, was yet as guileless of experience as his face was full of merriment, or as his harness was void of pretence. His saddle relied chiefly on its crupper to maintain it in place; while a rusty bridoon bit served to pull the rider along at such a pace and in such a direction as the pony might choose. A streamlet flowed through a dip in the grass field beside Cant's Thorns. Big boy and little pony made for this by common consent—not at the sober rate which suited other couples, but at a fierce gallop which brought them at once prominently to the front. The boy sat well forward as they raced at the rivulet; and they flew it simultaneously. The boy, however, had more way on than the pony; and so went on by himself some time before the pony had recovered from the effort. But this was not all. The pony was soon captured, and again set under his now muddy, but well gratified, rider—while the field clustered in a corner and the pony proceeded to roam about among them like a dog seeking his master. Wriggling under one horse, biting the tail of another, he made the acquaintance of each in turn—his master meanwhile grinning gaily upwards with a naïve delight that was positively killing. Now the pair

edged in between the Master and the gate, and ousted him out of that; that they might wade up and down the rill of water that crossed the gateway. Expostulation was altogether lost on the beaming boy, who had no more voice in the matter than his victims—by this time in a general roar, and wondering eagerly what would come next. It soon came. The single yellow girth which circled the pony's shaggy ribs suddenly snapped in two. The rosy rider bethought him he had best dismount—but for the life of him knew not how to effect it. First one leg he drew over the saddle till he had carried that stirrup to the crupper—the while he lay wriggling with his waistcoat glued to the mane and his arms round the rough hairy neck. Finding this of no avail, he tried hard to bring the other leg and stirrup over behind him. Round went the old saddle-pad; and full length under the shallow water went the beaming youth—his merry upturned face responding delightedly to a shout of laughter that might have been heard at Melton. The Master rode on with a smile of amusement not unmixed with relief—and proceeded to post all comers where they could do no harm while Welby Fishpond was drawn. But scarcely had he taken up his own position than with a rattle through the crowd came the irrepressible boy; to dash right across the covert at a pace that outdid pursuit, to disappear in the distance, and to leave a vision of a laughing face and a flying fugitive to make one's very dreams amusing that night.

But of the run—which was from Saxelby Wood, and which, with a little more luck, might have taken a much higher class than was destined for it. A fox that slipped away as he chose, not as he was bidden, set forth through the adjacent gorse of Grimston, and over the hill to the left of Old Dalby Wood—the scent apparently as fierce as the customers who were to be seen riding hotly in the wake of him, and *almost in that* of hounds. A nice country, level and easy to ride, lay in front; and prospects never looked better. But a good man who had sown his wheat declined Reynard his passage, shouted at, and turned him down among the steep broken gullies between the wood and

village of Old Dalby. The pack were able to push over these rather faster than men and horses ; and so came over the hill again virtually unaccompanied. Thus, when pursuers reached the higher ground once more, they were at a loss where to ride, and spread hither and thither in search. A few of them suddenly discovered that a single hound was running hard in the distance—parallel to the road they were on, and which leads to Widmerpool or Willoughby—and that another couple or so were following close behind him. “Surely the body of the pack must be in front,” they argued ; and on this hypothesis set forward to gallop the road till they might chime in at the head. These three or four hounds dashed on beautifully over the best of grass and fences ; but as the view opened no sign appeared of other hounds in front. “Another fox, no doubt—and of course we can’t go on !” was the conclusion forced on their unwilling minds when they had gone a mile. And back they turned to find their comrades and the other hounds. Soon down the wind came the crash of music and all the sound and panoply of the chase in motion. Parallel with the road, some sixteen couple were running briskly—a dozen men competing in hot haste at their backs, revelling in the good ground and the fresh, sharp scent it carried. This was the very line from which our returning friends had whipped themselves off some ten minutes before ! So at least there was a scent.

In the end they got on though slowly to the Curate ; there they learned that their fox had gone on with a single hound close after him—and sure enough, half a dozen fields away, came up to this hound baying over his half-killed fox in an orchard, and completed the task.

CRIPPLED.

YOU may see something from wheels, or even on foot—and certainly a start from Gartree Hill is a panorama worth witnessing, and fully accounts for the partiality always evinced by

a clustering crowd on the hilltop. Well, perhaps it was something to be spared the squeeze through the little double hand-gates of the plantation below—something not to be called on to scale the height of Dalby or the steep side of the Punchbowl—but 'twould need the calculating soul of a money-lender to derive comfort from such gains as these, on a hunting morning that might have been made to order. Of course hounds have run of late, and every day. Has not the glass been rising steadily, slowly, for more than a week? Has not the air been still and, generally, warm? Has not the sky been dull and quiet? and is not the ground as full of water as good drainage will allow? After a certain point the grass will hold no more. It lies in puddles on the surface; and a horse splashes through it far more easily than when the turf was only half-soaked. Thus, with every requirement arranged in favour of sport, fortune has thrown in her help, foxes have travelled, hounds have had every opportunity—and opportunities have been fully seized. The Quorn had been by no means in the best of luck up to this; but on Friday afternoon the tide fairly turned.

The lane by Thorpe Trussels was so closely packed that it seemed impossible for all to find an outlet when the signal to Go came dimly up the breeze from the Melton end of the covert. But the chase spread like a charge of shot from a gun-barrel, as it issued from the lane—and, ere wheels could rattle down to the corner of the covert, the mass of horsemen were already scattered thickly over the next half-mile to the railway below. Very evenly they seemed to be riding; and as the pack wavered a moment the riders closed up into an almost solid line—while the whip galloped up with stray hounds; the second horseman, finding the direction was in many cases nearly homewards, hurried forward with the morning horses to see something of the fun; and steady folk pounded along the road, or skirted for a nick. No province is it of mine to spy upon the habits, tastes, peculiarities or subterfuges of others, who ride for their own enjoyment, or at least of their own freewill and in their own way. Upon wheels one may see many situa-

tions that never come before one who is riding—but these are as much the property of the actors as is their own home life.

A mere passing statement, however, is quite admissible, to wit, Under no other circumstances is the conviction brought so forcibly home, that by no means every man who goes out hunting is a foxhunting enthusiast—while it becomes equally apparent that a certain number don't care about foxhunting at all. If such people had only a fair share of moral courage, they would surely consult their own pleasure most—and attain all their ends—if they rode home directly Reynard is afoot, and when the mere social preliminaries of the day are at an end. All after that must be to them a constant battle with self, a prolonged mental trial—to be renewed next day and the day after. Apart from these good people, another prominent (though, perhaps, again not very novel) fact pushes itself before the straining, longing eyes of the involuntary idler. Two or three hundred people ride where hounds have gone, or somewhere in that direction. How many of these see a hound at all, when hounds are really running? Not twenty. Often not five. The rest—bar a few thwarted competitors—have been “well in it,” for have they not been close at hand as the pack threw up, and were they not ready to play follow-my-leader again at a moment's notice? This is one of the boons that a strongly-fenced country confers on its patrons. Their minds find so many distractions in the task set them, that they can afford to sink many considerations (elsewhere essential), in the struggle to keep their heads above water. They are for the most part content to cut and thrust, as the blade of a fugleman flashes before them. The carvers belong to one of two classes—the ambitious novice or the skilled bruiser. The former goes through the mill either to emerge as a failure, or to tone down to a grade that mingles daring with experience. Another, a bastard carver, there is too; who can ride a line of gates “at the top o' the hunt,” and square his elbows at a gap as fiercely as a gendarme points his moustaches.

But our business lies up the road, beyond the railway station

of Great Dalby. A high slope gives us a point of vantage and a two-mile view. Even now we are in good company—though the fray is melting in the distance. A single rider is still setting a mulish horse at a flight of rails that a hundred hoofs have rattled and left. A single hound (poor fellow, I'm ten times more sorry for you !) is driving and zigzagging across the valley—desperately intent on regaining his comrades, if he can but make out their line. Road and lanes are besprinkled with galloping, or loitering, skirmishers, in each possible and impossible direction ; and forrard up the next hillside goes the fast-vanishing struggle. Oh, what a scent ! Oh, what a country ! Misty it is now ; and the rain is falling. But you ought to see better than this, though you *were* born of woman. Blow your nose, fool ; and stand up on the cushions ! How wide fellows ride, when the pace is good ! There's a field's difference between those on the right, and the lot on the left ; and they bend and sway with each other like squadrons on parade. Past Guadeloupe and over the hill, with the spire of Melton Church beckoning them on. God speed you, gallant gentlemen : You will tell us the tale to-morrow ! “Twenty and odd minutes to Melton—the best of fun. On by Wicklow Lodge and across the railway to Wyfordby. Firr got a view ; and pushed him back round Burbage's Covert to Burton. There hounds and fox were in the same field ; and he was done to a turn. But directly afterwards they seemed to get on to the old line, put up their heads, and lost him at the very spot where he had passed Wicklow Lodge before. But it was a sporting run, even without a finish.”

CONVALESCENT.

“RIDING to covert in Leicestershire is better fun than hunting in any other country,” says Whyte Melville.

Tuesday, Jan. 23rd, was a bright beautiful day, with the sun shining gaily, but with a crisp cold feeling in the air that

scoffed at any thought of a coming spring. Just the day for the Tilton Hills, just the day for an onlooker seeking information, but shirking his share in the fray—for a post on any one of the prominent eminences hereabouts gave a birdseye view, that was distinctly and sharply marked up to the most distant horizon. Horses and hounds two miles away looked as if reduced from life-size by photography, and with none of their outline lost or even blurred in the far perspective. But, while men of conscience and capacity had worked out the early part in the day in travelling on a cold scent well nigh to the Coplow—and to all appearance had fallen freely by the way—your recorder was pursuing only the result of circumstances and an instinct which pointed down wind, to Owston Wood. To reach this from Brooksby's castellated mansion involves a ride along what he has learned, in his more or less limited experience, to look upon as the most fascinating bridle-road in the Midlands—to wit, that by the brookside from Twyford to Owston. Its charms have been, of course, enhanced, almost sanctified, by association with the Great Ranksboro' Run of 1875, of which this vale formed the chief scene. But, apart from this, it has a beauty that cannot but appeal to the eye and heart of any man who loves a grass country. For, from either bank of the tempting Twyford Brook, miles of old and roughly-fenced turf slope gently upward to the higher levels of Burrough or Tilton with never a cottage, scarcely a tree, to break the wild expanse. Here Reynard is little likely to encounter anybody or anything to turn him from his path: here hounds can travel quickly if they can travel anywhere; and here a rider need never fear but that a bold horse and a bold heart can carry him whither he may choose.

The keen clear air of Tuesday allowed the eye full play and the imagination full scope, bidding them wander at their will into the far distance, or travel again over well-recognized scenes. The quiet southerly breeze (which might at any moment bear upon it the clamour of the approaching chase) only fanned the midday cigar, aiding pleasant reverie, and inciting to happy.

fancy. The very reverse of poetry had been the earlier part of the ride. A horse specially chosen for his placid disposition and peaceful ways had recklessly ignored the trust reposed, had turned traitor out of pure inconsiderateness, and made the first three miles in merry sunshine a hateful and bone-shaking experience by his silly pranks. At each village and every roadside cot the beauty of the day had been turned to practical use by the gudewives; who, after spending the morning over their washtubs, had now utilised the afternoon by hanging every conceivable form of undergarment to flop in the breeze, and to scare horse and rider out of their wits.

So much (too much) of the late comer by the way. Owston Village was reached at last; and the long vista of the northern edge of the Wood eagerly scanned. No sign of hounds—nor sound, till a chance shepherd heard them in the distance, beyond Robin-a-Tiptoe's ponderous slope. Then—with the suddenness with which a Hunt and its surroundings always break into sight—here they were, only a single field away, and about to enter Owston Wood at its western end. Not the first time by many was it that we had dipped into the great wood—and in very much the same good and ever-persevering company as now. But never has the deep clay of its rides seemed half so difficult to traverse. To keep within hearing of hounds and huntsmen as they worked hither and thither, demanded a labour and a determination worthy of any cause—and what better can there be than foxhunting? In ordinary years we have at least been able to trot about. Now we could only crawl and wallow—little by little. Horses were constantly up to their very girths; and frequently had to stop progress altogether while they pulled their feet out with laborious plunges. Before long, hounds were holloaed away on the Withcote side, where the chief cross ride cuts the wood; and for the next five-and-thirty minutes they ran hard.

“To-morrow at 11.30, gentlemen!” was the kindly decision worded by the Duke of Rutland, when on Wednesday (Jan. 24) it was found impossible for his hounds to throw off at Croxton

Park. And in honest gratitude will his Grace's health be toasted to-night (Thursday, 25th) at many a dinner-table 'twixt Melton and Grantham. *Eight-and-thirty minutes* without a check, and a hunting run requiring another hour and a-half to complete, sums up the result of the indulgence. It has come on post-day ; and a long ride home has narrowed the available margin still more. But as far as time will allow, and as far as the assistance of a kind friend's confidential (a sort of invalid chair on four galloping legs) enabled me to see it, I will set down the outline of this—the latest of the many good things enjoyed by the Belvoir this season. Even at twelve o'clock the roads were so hard and glassy that it was difficult and terrifying to ride to Croxton Park from Melton, or elsewhere. But, shortly after noon, Gillard moved off upon the five miles of mud that intervene between the meet and Coston Covert—a bright sun meanwhile doing its best to dispel the lingering frost. A fox had been killed in covert here within the fortnight ; but another stout venturer had taken his place, and in the next ten minutes he was away, with horn and cheer ringing close to his ears. The village of Coston seemed the earliest point ; but in the second or third field, fox left the plough, and turned right down the wind in the direction of Woodwell Head. Thus he passed again within half a mile of the covert he had left ; and with a capital scent the beautiful "middle pack" of the Belvoir set to work upon the grass. An early and ugly bit of timber was promptly scattered by Mr. Hutchinson, who on a neat and well-bred bay was riding brilliantly throughout the run. Beyond Wymondham the cream of the gallop ensued.

Their fox, with his head again up the wind, had skirted the right of the village, as was delightfully testified by yokels of every degree, and he was going for his life. Once clear of the outskirts of Wymondham (*i.e.*, of the two or three small wheat-fields immediately touching it) he was again on excellent grass. How wonderfully firm and sound it rode—even in this deep wet winter ! The fences were chiefly timber-mended gaps in

high bullfinches, or else fair stake-and-bounds; and all were such as a Leicestershire horse should cover with comfort and pleasure. The pace brought its usual complement of grief; and I even heard a vague rumour of somebody having doubled a fallen horse and rider in a style worthy of The Lamb in his second Liverpool. But when chance gave me the opportunity of taking stock of the flying scene as it passed, I saw some twenty good sportsmen going their best and straightest, with a dozen spots in each fence to divide between them. Mr. H. T. Barclay and Mr. Alfred Brocklehurst were level with the staff in office—while immediately close rode Count Kaunitz, Capts. Ashton, Boyce, Molyneux, and Pennington. Mrs. F. Sloane-Stanley was well with hounds, and the Rector of Stonesby set an example that all might follow—who could. “Oh, for a forty-parson power!” But this was only a flash of the changing light. ’Twas thus they neared and touched Saxby, to carry their flight in varied order past Freeby to the plantation beyond—Day’s Spinney is, I believe, the title of a modern construction. A double back to the churchyard of Freeby—and thirty-eight minutes (a computation by average) brought a first slight check—to be succeeded by a possible change by Freeby Wood, many circles round about Newman’s Gorse, &c., &c., and a *fait accompli* in a fox to ground by Stonesby Village. But those straight four miles upwind were Leicestershire—and post demands epitome even after a real scenting day.

DEAR DIRTY FEBRUARY.

To the Belvoir belong most of the honours so far, into the Melton season ’82–83. Week after week they have placed something handsome to their credit—and not only, I believe, in this neighbourhood, but in every quarter of the Duke of Rutland’s still extensive country. Their run of Wednesday—the last day of January—was delightful. Not only did it come after a broken period of several days, in which storm and

tempest reigned paramount, and sport was but the shuttlecock of fate and weather ; but it was both a hound-run and a riding run—enjoyable from all points of view. With every advantage of country and distance, it could be seen by everyone, while at the same time no one who would jump and ride could say that he lacked scope or opportunity. If it had not quite the dash of the gallop of the Thursday previous (from Coston Covert), it covered more and equally good ground ; and, if possible, hounds were seen to-day at better advantage, for from find to finish there was scarcely occasion to touch them.

Exactly the same morning as on that Thursday—cold, quiet, and so frosty that hardly a horse was started from Melton, on his five miles' journey to Croxton Park, at eleven o'clock. It was about 12.30 before it was deemed advisable to move off from the Park, and then the five miles were done over again—a *feu de joie* from a party of gunners saluting the cavalcade as it passed the Brentingby Spinneys, on its way to Mr. Burbage's Covert. But the secrecy of the visit was all in vain. Melton town did not mean to be defrauded of its civic rights ; had turned out in strength at an early hour, and, in so doing, had disturbed a brace of foxes. So when Gillard got there, the covert was bare—and emptiness again awaited him at Melton Spinney.

But on the opposite hillside, and beyond the Melton Brook, is a little ash copse—Scalford Spinney—from which several smart gallops have, in the last season or two, had their source. And hence, before half the stragglers had collected, a fox was viewed away towards Old Hills, and the huntsman and hounds were hurrying up to the little lane which bounds it. A momentary difference of opinion led to more than a momentary loss of time ; but in three fields more hounds had swung across the fugitive's line, and went into it with a vigour that at once pronounced a scent. What a hurry we were all in ! As well might a freshdrawn cork be replaced in a bottle of "The Boy," and keep back the froth, as that a Leicestershire field once started should quiet itself forthwith into dull sobriety. And

now it wanted but a quarter to three, on a short January day. No one over-rode the hounds, 'tis true; for no one could—inasmuch as a line of railway stood almost immediately in their path. Perhaps no one would have done. But it was a hard good field, of mettle as keen as ever rode to the Belvoir.

The wooded basin of Old Hills was left just to the right; and the ironwork-railway crossed. At the Nottingham road, a curious turn of the fox was quickly and cleverly unravelled by the huntsman; the hounds were set on their way in a second over strong grass fields, and their followers had to work in their wake amid locked gates and almost unmanageable fences as best they could. Over the hill-side the pack were quite shut out from view by the tall and quickly-recurring bullfinches; but, as they neared the Quorn covert of Cant's Thorns, a second shooting party was encountered. Reynard slightly turned in his path, and held up towards Wartnaby. It was marvellous now to note the wide development to which knowledge of locality can be brought, by dint of study and instinct of self-preservation. No sooner was the valley in sight, down which runs the Wartnaby and Saxelby Bottom, than, with the same accord that moves a flock of starlings, the whole field bore to the right for the narrow part where the fence is jumpable—swooping down upon it as if beckoned by one common beacon. The only, and luckless, exception was in the person of a fine rider and good sportsman who hails from a strange countrie; and who, in the honest belief that Leicestershire should at least be as sound ground as Yorkshire,* rode straight forward, to find himself embedded in a deep black bog. By some happy management, however, he reappeared upon the scene within half an hour, and with no worse injury than a loss of appearance and half his reins.

On over fine grass, that even in this season of deluge is at least rideable—in comfort and at a gallop—while the little ladies of Belvoir sped merrily forward, and fences came clean

* The late Mr. E. Leatham, "in truth a gallant gentleman."

and freely. There is seldom a giant field with the Belvoir; but that of to-day included many faces besides those regularly in attendance. Mrs. Candy was renewing pleasant memories in a gallop over familiar ground, and riding with zest and talent as pronounced as ever. Nor was hers the only habit distinguishable—or distinguished—in the first flight of the run. Mrs. F. Sloane-Stanley never missed a needful fence wherever hounds led; and Mrs. Pennington rode the line with equal success. Then had not Capt. J. Brocklehurst reappeared on the scene, with his old talent for crossing a country no whit the less bright for his sojourn in the land of Egypt? Mr. George Lambton was there from Buckinghamshire; Mr. Hugh Owen from Gloucestershire; Mr. E. Leatham from Yorkshire; and Mr. Fletcher from Sussex. The men of Oakham have taken most kindly to the Belvoir Wednesdays; and were represented to-day by Col. and Mr. Fred. Gosling, and Mr. Beaumont—while from Melton and round about came Lord Wilton, Col. Forester, Capts. Smith, Boyce, Ashton, Pennington, Counts Kinsky and Kaunitz, Messrs. A. Brocklehurst, H. Barclay, &c.—with Capt. Longstaff, Messrs. Drummond, J. Welby, Burdett-Coutts, from the home country. And the above, with several others, were all riding right up to hounds throughout.

Soon the chase had reached Saxelby Wood, passed through that covert, touched Grimston Gorse, and skirted Old Dalby Wood. Now they were at last on plough—only two fields of it, but enough to bring forth a spirit of thankfulness for that ours is in the main a grass country. Close at their fox, hounds made light of the arable; and racing past Lord Aylesford's Gorse (scarcely a field away) dived down into Shoby Scoles—while riders galloped parallel on the grassy ridge above. Forty minutes to here. Surely we must get up to him now! There he is! See his brown form crawling over the slope. And the galloping horsemen pull up on the brow—while the pack work noisily up to them.

In brief, the hunt went forward—whether with a fresh fox or a tired one is a matter of conjecture. If a fresh one, he

seemed strangely abroad in his own country. If tired, he must have been marvellously stout. With the scent as good as ever, they pressed him over grass and occasional plough round Ragdale ; past the back of Six Hills towards Wimeswold. Without assistance they hunted fast over this district, bent back to the right to recross the Fosse, and lost him suddenly and inexplicably as he dodged the hedgerows about a mile from Old Dalby Wood. For an hour and seventeen minutes they had been running continuously, and generally hard—the extreme points (from Scalford Spinney into the barren region beyond Six Hills) quite seven miles and a half apart.

Every evil element was brought into play on Friday and Saturday (Jan. 26 and 27)—snow, hail, wind, and rain, and the vilest of them all was the wind. No one needs to be reminded that a rampant gale was blowing on both those days. It mattered little or nothing that it scattered your tiles and chimney pots ; for you were either snugly indoors, or foolishly out hunting. Friday was wind and sunshine—a fixture rather more pleasant than the tempest and downpour of the Saturday. It took two hands and a facile horse to open a gate on Friday. Saturday called for an amiable mind, and the most artful of clothing, to withstand the rushing rain and the piercing cold, that assailed one at the door and bullied one incessantly till the same shelter was regained. Pleasure—duty—or want of moral courage : which was the impelling power that forced so many frail forms to the covert-side on that wild wet Saturday with the Cottesmore ? Pleasure could certainly not have been the agent, unless in its falsest phase, anticipation. Duty is a force that has its weight with some ; but is by no means an universal or even a fashionable influence in this latter half of the nineteenth century—and in this instance was likely to sway only the Hunt officials, and perhaps some wretched correspondent. So Want of Moral Courage—the dread of omitting to do what others would probably venture—is the

remaining alternative, which will account, I presume to think, in a great measure for the discomfort voluntarily and freely self-inflicted.

As for the existing grievance of soil and weather, it merely ranks among the petty causes that induce an Englishman to maintain his privilege never so freely as in reference to fox-hunting. He will grumble when rain falls freely; he mutters when the sun shines brightly. He uses deplorable language when he is blown about by a gale of wind; and he cries aloud when frost brings fine weather. He hates a crowd; and he won't hunt in the provinces while he can afford himself place in the tumult of the Shires. He rebels loudly against a "ringing" fox; yet it is not invariably "his day" when it happens that a straight good point is achieved. Then, as to his mounts, well, he seldom says much against them—for who knows when they may be on offer? But in his heart he has probably a vivid grievance against every unit of perfection in an expensive stud. Such grievances are hidden, and accumulative—too often in direct proportion to the age and purse-capacity of the grievance-owner. At any rate, they won't bear analysis. Altogether, methinks, foxhunting is a most fascinating and enviable pursuit in the abstract. But in the practical form of everyday experience it would seem to be beset with so many difficulties, annoyances, shortcomings and drawbacks, that it is a wonder so many men are found still guileless enough to embark upon and cling to it.

On Saturday the Cottesmore could not leave the kennels for frost, till another hour of rain had softened the roads. That rain continued to pelt pitilessly till late in the afternoon. But if driven disagreeably home to the feelings of the majority, it proved more or less of a mercy to a hardworking official—for the latter had got over all the disagreeable sensations of cold water long before he encountered the shock of finding himself in a deep pond. In common with several others he had jumped a stile beneath a tree; but, intent on his hounds, saw nothing of what the others had dodged away from, as one by

one they had landed on its brink. Or at the most it only caught his eye as one of the many puddles flooding the meadows—till, with a wild bound the mare landed him, or rather soused him, into the deep muddy water. The splash came loud and suddenly; the black water went up to heaven—and all was for a moment still. Then up rose a horse's head—but nothing for some seconds to show that a rider, too, was immersed. Up it came at last, like a Jack-in-the-Box—or like an apple in a bucket at a school feast. Nor hat nor cap betrayed its identity—but who shall make fun of that honest face, albeit it wore a very comic aspect then? Anxiety for his safety checked every inclination to laugh at the time. Why go back to it now? A true good servant was not drowned; but was soon in the saddle again.

DEEPER AND DEEPER.

THE best day during the next week was Friday, February 2nd. We have seen no better scenting day this season; and if the Quorn hounds failed to kill a fox, it was no fault of theirs—for they ran as if in view nearly all day. Their first fox has to thank the development of Melton into a great railway centre for his escape; for he beat them at the junction-point of four different lines of rail, and then only because the river Wreake also stepped in to help him. After this they struck off a fox on the move, and bundled him round the country till one and then another substitute took up the running. Thus they went furiously for about an hour and a half—the last five-and-twenty minutes bringing a beaten fox, and many very beaten horses, to the main earth at Melton Spinney, in the Duke's country. It is curious how it falls to the lot of certain localities to be trodden for a while almost day by day—till the tide moves elsewhere and another district comes in for its turn. For the last week Old Hills and Wartnaby have been the rallying points for both Quorn and Belvoir; and every field and

every fence within hail of them have more than once felt the rush of the passing chase. Wednesday, Friday, and Monday again, hounds ran fast over the same area, Firr *duce* or Gillard *consule*.

Friday was rainy from start to finish—but very different from the many wet days of the present season, for the rain fell soft and warm, and covert coats were gladly thrown aside before work began—the disclosures (I speak as one of the many on whom the impeachment may rest) showing that comfort, as very distinct from either ornament or even respectability, had been the aim of the toilette. Some men will maintain a smart appearance under almost any difficulties, out of a very proper respect for themselves and an innate appreciation of the regard of others—and a certain number of these were doing their duty to-day, in pink and beaver. At the meet and at the early covertside they stood out in marked superiority, a credit to their tenets and their Hunt; while the ill-dressed ones shuffled uneasily in their saddles, standing as far aloof as possible from criticism, and shunning all society save that of their fellow sinners. But, a very little while of the water and slush, that throughout the day reigned paramount around and underfoot, reduced elegance and shabbiness, the spendthrift and the economist, to the same muddy level—making the bright flower faded and bedraggled, and hiding the modest weed under a cloak that covered all his shortcomings.

Thorpe Satchville Hall being the meet, the Master arranged to visit Gartree Hill to commence with, and thus secured for Mr. Hartopp's fine covert, for once, a freedom from footpeople, and a fair chance. Even under these circumstances the foxes were fully alive; and a brace broke away over the Burton Flat directly hounds were in covert. Though a cold wet fallow met the latter as they emerged, the pack showed at once what the scent was to be; and in a few seconds more they were together and away over the grass. A locked gate and a bullfinch of twenty years' growth then stood in the path, to damp ambition and ardour just bursting into flame. Here it was, I fancy, that

horse and man—both steeplechase heroes of renown—fell victims to the uncompromising timber. We seldom jump gates in Leicestershire—never, if we can help it—for the double reason that most of us have long ago learned to be afraid of them ; and, secondly, that we go through so many every day that our horses get altogether out of the way of looking upon them as jumpable fabric. So, when the horse of the country is suddenly called upon to negotiate one as a fence, he is only too likely to imagine some mistake has been made—and so omits to rise in time to avoid making another himself. The consequences are generally unpleasant, as the gate seldom fails to resent the liberty, and the gateway is too often paved with brick ends and rough blocks of stone. Nor was the example in point the only instance of the day to illustrate the inadvisability of such essays ; for, in addition to the downfall of the pair that have borne the grenade so gallantly, a worse disaster overtook Mr. Pryor in the loss of his grand and venerable chestnut. The latter injured himself so severely over another gate in the course of the day, that orders were given for his destruction. How many seasons the old horse had carried his master I am unable to say ; but he was at least “of age,” and an association commenced at Oxford has concluded with some ten seasons at Melton.

But of the run just commenced.—A dive through the ash plantation to the left, a wriggle through close-growing trees, and a scramble over others recently cut—were the outcome of despair and the renewal of hope half crushed. Hounds swung leftward, too ; and the half-field lost was easily to be recovered, by horses fresh and fit. That Burton Flat is lovely riding, when a fox keeps to the grass and the scent is hot. The fences, unless my craven soul misguides me, took a great deal of covering. One’s own spurs are as a rule well sharpened ; the order to “drive him at his fences” was executed as well as a long pair of legs and a very pronounced dread of a fall can effect ; Confidence (chestnut gelding, pedigree unknown, not for sale) is a lengthy horse and a powerful jumper. Yet the ditch

on the farther side was more than once cut a foot wider into the field than either Confidence or Cowardice had calculated ; and a moment of struggling suspense added yet another grey hair to locks that a score of seasons had already streaked with silver and fear. But, even with the water splashing upward from every furrow, the turf over which the Grand National Hunt is this year to disport, was sound enough to carry a horse fairly up to his jumps, and to send him easily from its surface as he rose at timber or topbinder. The Melton and Oakham road was jumped into and out of, close to the Cottesmore meet of Wild's Lodge. The fox then bore leftward from Berry Gorse, made straight for Mr. Burbage's Covert, and in so doing brought his field over the Burton Brook—that will figure in the steeple-chases to come. It has its full quantum of horseflesh in its waters now ; for, of the leaders who rode over or in, none recked of the ford *ten yards away*, on the other side the hedge ! (And this fact, my gay comrades, is given you gleefully



by the one you baited unmercifully the week before, for riding at the Saltby Brook in the Belvoir gallop, when shallow water was to be discovered close at hand.) This difficulty got over or through, it was easy and cheery to gallop on to Burbage's

Covert; and to pull up hot and excited, as the hounds swam the swollen current of the Wreake, and gained the covert beyond. Half swimming, half wading, wholly wet, the field followed through what is generally a ford. Men tucked their legs on to their horses' necks. Fair ladies allowed the muddy water to touch only such portion of their apparel as they nowadays purchase from Peel and Tautz. But neither sex was spared by the yellow flood, which tried hard to sweep them bodily down-stream. And their perils and difficulties had only just begun—when five-and-twenty minutes from the start. Now they found that Reynard had played them the unhandsome trick of recrossing the river immediately beyond the covert; and, as soon as a crawling puffing luggage train allowed them, they had to avail themselves of the railway and its bridge, in order to get back over the stream. By this time hounds had disappeared somewhere in the direction of Melton: and, though riders made all haste to double out of the railway, over a heap of sleepers and the thorn fence at the foot of the embankment, the next mile or two was only a gallop on guess.

They got news, but no sight, as they passed by Wyndham Lodge and the outskirts of the town; but it was several minutes more before they found the pack hunting busily among the lines of railway that converge into Melton from the west. Their fox had rounded the town, and now sought refuge in confusion. Already there was a babel of sound and signal. Porters, platelayers, and signalmen flocked forth from every side to shout and help. Red flags were waved to protect the pack; green ones to attract the huntsman whither the fox had gone. White gates were thrown open for the passage of all who could cross the first iron way, to venture into the most curious labyrinth that ever foxhunting entered. Queer excavations had to be jumped; bits of old thorn or timber fences still blocked the way between embankments and cuttings; and at every few yards it seemed as if the Hunt was fairly entrapped. Now came a lofty banked line which for the moment threatened to put an end to all further progress; till someone discovered a

brick archway some seventeen hands high. Knights and squires, dames and damsels, were all off their horses in a jiffy; and it was found that pommels could just scrape under the brickwork, to emerge in safety beyond the embankment. But another well-fenced railway again stared them in the face; while the river flowed by on the other flank, deep, dark, and wide. Hounds feathered on the water's edge; and it was quite certain Reynard must have crossed somewhere. So there was nothing for Firr to do, but make the best of his way into and through the town of Melton, getting round to the other side of Egerton Lodge as quick as he could. But he was able to do no more towards picking up a well-earned fox. Rumour had it that the gardener had seen him enter Lord Wilton's garden—where the Cottesmore fox of October found refuge.

CLIMAX OF DIRT AND SPORT.

ALTERNATE days of storm and calm—the former in the ascendant with reference to hunting, as the latter scored the one day on which men and horses should be at rest. Thus has the week been passed. Gales and flood you have all experienced and read of elsewhere. We have had our full portion—meted out at the most unfitting moments. Others may have made their hay while the sun shone; but our lot, except on Friday as below, has been amid storm and tempest unutterable.

Friday, February 9th—with the Quorn at Queniborough—was noticeable for more people, more mud, and more croppers than any day of the present season. No one was informed of the rendezvous until the day previous. What would the crowd have been under advertisement? We have seen many Quorn Fridays still more densely attended—but even this was thickly packed enough to have made a stranger gasp, or tremble. And in the goodly day's sport provided, there seemed room enough for all to see as much as their individual power and prowess would prompt. As to the mud, it made itself patent long before

the falls began—and they came freely enough as soon as the ball was really set a rolling. The authority of the oldest fox-hunter—of course the Rev. John Bullen, now riding his eightieth season—goes to bear out the assertion that Leicestershire was never so wet and deep as now. Horses may splash and flounder over the surface for a half-hour's burst even yet ; for the saturated ground will take in no more moisture, and they slip out as readily as they slip in. Besides, horses that still have legs to go upon are twice as fit as in the earlier months. But when once their first vigour is exhausted, and the impetus of pace no longer exists—when, instead of rushing over their fences as they reach them, they are called upon to pull up and gather themselves afresh for a strong effort at each deep trodden gap, as must be when a large field is finding its way over a wet country in a slow hunting run—then the depth of the ground finds them out, and sets its stamp in the shape of falls innumerable. Fences of which a pony would have made light in November, now constantly effect the downfall of accomplished hunters. They jump into bogs where a bog never existed before ; they slide into ditches, and slip up to timber ; and they fall from exhaustion when in ordinary times their strength would have been scarcely taxed. Men who would continue to ride to hounds have learnt to accept their tumbles cheerfully by the brace ; esteem one per diem as of no account, making of a cropper no bones, as they never seem to break any. Hatters and tailors are having a pressure put upon them that is far more cheerfully borne than is the strain that has devolved upon the gentlemen of the wardrobe at home. The latter have at last encountered the bugbear of work, in its most serious form ; and in some cases have only been withheld from throwing up the sponge by an appeal to their finer feelings of self interest. The grooms have still more to bear—and they bear it in sorrow that is not always silent. Having by this time exhausted every nostrum that bears upon blows, bangs and strains, they have had to fall back—wherever the material of mastership is sufficiently pliable or solvent—on a requisition

for reinforcement, and have packed their employers off to the scene of every sale in the kingdom. Hunting men who are sadly alive to the limit of their income or their credit—or, is it possible in any case, of the sum they consider the game is worth?—have already grown querulous over the state of the country, avowing that hunting is “no pleasure under such circumstances.” Ye gods, have we not known too many frost-bound Februaries? Here they have not lost a day since early December—and who shall say how many open seasons he has before him?

Friday was a day they all appreciated—though, as I have said, it was the muddiest, so far, of the winter (to be outdone in that respect—beaten out of memory almost—by the following Saturday and Monday). From Queniborough Village to Barkby Holt was a clever flank march that at once shook off half the camp following of such a corps d’armée as had mustered to hunt. The Gorse alongside the Holt is an excellent starting point for a fox, when the field has been duly marshalled—as it was on this perfect hunting-morning. A good fox meant to go straight; but the disappointed following of cobblers, factory-hands and what-nots, that had left Leicester and their work behind for a share in the national pastime, were posted along the opposite hillside, by Queniborough Spinney—an almost impassable chain across Reynard’s path. He got in among them, and was chased hither and thither—like a stray hare amid the battalions of an Aldershot field day—for some minutes, while huntsman and pack and field bore down in hot haste upon him. By some miracle he then burst through the throng, shot through one of Mr. Cheney’s Spinneys, and made the direction he wanted. From Gaddesby Old Mill to Ashby Pastures could not have been more than another quarter of an hour’s galloping—but the effect at the latter covert-side was apparent in a most marked degree. Two noble riders bore black and deeplaid, but fortunately, not serious traces of a simultaneous roll, achieved at a new made drain. Another of gentle blood had been under his

horse in a ditch ; but the bottom of the cutting being too narrow to admit of the horse and himself occupying it at same time, he had been able to compound for a release with the loss of spurs, hat and whip. A fourth proclaimed a disastrous failure at timber with a thick plastering not only of his own well-dressed form, but of every square inch of the graceless quadruped that had served him such a trick. And ere the day was out these four were but ordinary samples of forty.

Saturday, February 10th, came in rotation as another wild, wet, day. The Cottessmore were at Leesthorpe, and the first move was in search of a fox said to be quartered in a tree by the riverside about opposite Wyfordby. The huntsman rode right under the tree (an ordinary ash, if I remember right) and there, stretched flat along a branch, lay the gentleman in question—his eyes twinkling at the intruders, and his yellow fur in prominent contrast to the dark bough on which he reclined, some ten feet above the ground. Down he came when called upon. Little enough law was given him though, and jumping as far as he could, he lit almost among the pack—splash into the shallow wet ditch. I fancy they scarcely realised at first what was among them ; for he was able to roll out, and, drenched as he was, to get out of their way before they could seize him. Doubling a first hedgerow, he saved his life—though he had many narrow escapes before he was clear of their jaws. A fresh fox, except in infancy, is generally quicker than hounds, if he has a hedgerow to help him ; for they seem to get in each other's way in their impetuous excitement. Meanwhile, as they started in chase, a second fox leaped down behind them and slipped off in safety—a *third one* preferring to remain ensconced on the same branch. A single fox in a tree used to be held almost a phenomenon. To have verified three in one tree is a fact to be noted.

There was not scent enough to kill—scarcely enough to bother—the one they pursued.

The state of the country—yes, even of this country, off which the water rushes almost as it falls—is the one topic on which men harp, and on which they will continue to harp until suddenly they wake to find themselves amid the dust of March.

ROUGE ET NOIR.

ANOTHER giant meet of the Quorn was Friday, February 16th, this time at South Croxton, and on a hot bright day that offered an early and unwelcome foretaste of spring. I need not descant on the crowd. Every one who had attended at Queniborough the week before was without fail at South Croxton,—and had brought his cousins and friends with him besides. The Quorn Hunt funds should be in a very flourishing condition, if half of those who come out with the hounds contribute their mite. Do they, Mr. Secretary?

About a warm sunny morning with a sharp rime frost still lingering under the hedgerows, there are theories diverse and abstruse in connection with scent. Most of these are opposed to it. But have not the Belvoir cast such to the winds on various mornings this winter? The opposition scored this morning, however; for the fox from Barkby Holt had it all his own way from the very start. No one could complain of the crowd in this slow pursuit to Scraptoft; for not half a dozen people got away with the hounds, or even joined them before the end of their first check—only three fields away. And why? Because the rides were deep, and they had posted themselves where they thought, or wished, Reynard should break. Strange to say, he determined otherwise, and broke in a direction diametrically opposed to the one appointed—a freak that seldom fails to produce a result of like disaster.

All that was noteworthy in the next half-hour was written in black and scarlet on the chief actors. The soil of Leicestershire is an ink that clings in proportion to its meed of water.

It is in splendid writing order now ; and students dip heartily in it, to inscribe themselves on the scroll of notoriety. The rides of Barkby Holt alone form an inkpot to confer a day's immortality on the plunger ("*ex uno discat qui coatum scarlet habebat*"—*vide Grammar Rugbiensis*, p. 83). English and Irish classics may have been on the decline ; but Gallic rose briskly as ever, after a thrice-repeated check. (Typical Developments illustration suggested, Two Quorn Fridays—Mr. Sturges, please note!) But *the* subject for an artist—artist, let us presume, being mounted sufficiently well to laugh at a blind ditch and to take out his pencil as he flew an oxer—was the most gallant of all gallant men, who rode the whitest of all white horses (and rode him with the longest of spurs and heartiest of hearts). Superlative knew all about it—the white horse knew nothing. Can you wonder then that Superlative legged it across two ploughed fields to start with ? Accept this, and believe that Superlative cut out the work through the first fence following the early check, cleaned out the ditch and levelled the hedge that had the impertinence to present itself next ? A bridge, a ford ! Pshaw ! Keep these for non-hunting countries ! Give me a milk-white steed with his head on the bank and his rowelled flanks laved in mid-stream. A bold good man, though. May we soon see him on a better horse !

But the run of Friday was from Scraftoft Gorse. The pack had worked through its bare remnant, and were being carried on to the Holt beyond—when a single old hound ferreted a fox out of a thorn bush. At this time there were horses and people enough to fill half a mile of the lane leading from Hall to Holt ; and now they had to spread in pursuit as best they might. Most of them, it must be allowed, at once got inextricably involved in their own numbers. But, as usual, the few leading ready spirits of the year slipped to the front as if by magic. Capt. Smith was half across the first field before anyone else was out of the lane : then half a dozen others broke loose at once from different points—and

the tide surged on towards Thurnby. Almost immediately, however, it swept round to the right, and cut the lane near Scraftoft Hall. Into the lane was awkward enough—with its wide straggling hedge and deep blind ditch—and we of the road found it no easy task to ride clear of falling horses and rolling men. But out of the lane presented a difficulty still less fascinating, in the form of a strong oxer, to be taken at a stand. The leaders rattled the far rail gaily; and sat in all sorts of queer postures as they wriggled over. But it seemed a long long time ere any one made the timber give—and meanwhile the hounds were flying down the slope for Keyham as if their fox was still in view.

Why is it that year by year your penman has only some half-dozen names with which to ring the changes, with any special pack? Is it fair upon the scribbler that, with every craving for variety of material, he finds that each season a certain few men single themselves out as keener and quicker than others in each Hunt, though the test comes day after day? Thus it was heart-breaking in that first bruising ten minutes to look ahead in vain for fresh food. (The printer's devil, in fact, seeking whom he might devour.) I believe I am safe in asserting that I can tell the back of every thruster of the Quorn, a good field away. Mr. Leatham's sturdy figure was unmistakably forward on the bay; Capt. Smith and Downs were alongside him (these two never fall out of the prominent few—or certainly never have since I began hunting); while Count Kinsky, with Messrs. Brocklehurst and Barclay, again went to represent the flower of Melton (all of them, by the way, buds of very recent years). Lord Manners had lost scarce any ground by his fall, and was with hounds again in two fields. But several others lost all their chance just now, by jumping a fence to the right and condemning themselves to two fields of deep steam-plough. How cheering it is, when a bullfinch frowns unbroken and apparently impenetrable between you and hounds, to see two sharp quick men flash through it in turn—leaving it all easy and open for the next anxious comer! So argued he,

hugging himself and squeezing his horse joyously. But the good beast had an eye farther forward than his master; had marked the other two horsemen turn at once down the hedge-side after their jump—and forthwith he *cut the corner*. The pair came through; but came through in ribbons. 'Tis mar-

vellous what the weight of a galloping horse (one with substance enough to carry 14 stone over wet Leicestershire) will burst through. But, oh, how the face and apparel of the hapless rider suffer, is eloquently told by bleeding features, torn hat, and general aspect of piteous discomfiture! At the road into Keyham the van closed up; the hounds took a moment to make their swing forward; and then the rush went on, straight over the grass to Barkby Holt. The remainder of the eighteen minutes thither might be ridden either by gate or fence; for the hounds ran close to the bridle-road throughout. They who rode most honestly found plenty of jumping; and even fell foul of the Beeby stream on their way—arriving at the covert almost simultaneously with the less venturesome. Hounds rattled through the wood and through the gorse at

once—but did not leave the latter readily. A fox had gone on, and the natural assumption was in favour of his being the hunted one. But pace had disappeared: and the remaining hour of the run was pretty hunting, but by Gaddesby Spinney along the brookside to Queniborough Village—on the outskirts of which they were forced to confess themselves beaten.

A MIXED MARCH.

ITS first week was illustrative of March in the completest manner—its mildest and its wildest phases alike represented. At its best the week has been perfect for hunting; at its worst it has been admirable for farming—and who shall grudge the farmers all they want? Certainly not foxhunters. Already they have dust almost as much as they can need; already the fallows are fit for breaking; and already the ridges of turf will bear a cart wheel without suffering. The gateways have in many instances arrived at their summer ruggedness; the ground rattles where its surface is bare, though the furrows tread deep and wet, and sheltered grass grasps the hoof with distressing tenacity.

Friday, March 2.—The Quorn at Lowesby Hall—the most picturesque of lawn-meets, and, as it happened, the most superb of hunting days. We think a great deal more of such a day in this final month than we ever did in November, or in the hey-day of the season. One of the last meals of a condemned man, one of the final holidays of grandeur and senility at Cannes—are these inapt comparisons? We are never so inordinately fond of foxhunting as in its last weeks (gauge the fact by number!), when foxhunting is on the flicker, brighter than ever now and then, but struggling hard to live. A “perfect hunting day” may carry a varied definition. It defined itself on Friday cold, clear, and quiet—the wind nor'-easterly, sun dormant, and the whole to play upon ground improved by ten days' warmth and one shower. In fact, if ever there could, and should, be a

scent, it was on Friday. That there was a scent was amply proved by the way the Quorn ladies burst their quarry in forty minutes; that they had not a great run was due only to the fact that they did not find a straight fox. The coverts that usually follow as a matter of routine upon a meet at Lowesby had unfortunately sustained a visit only the week before—some of them, indeed, had been within sound and touch of Sir Bache Cunard's hounds only two days previously. So John o' Gaunt failed for the first time, though Lord Moreton's Gorse came to the rescue. Firr galloped hounds across the railway that now cuts this fair valley to pieces, and laid them on beside the line before a quarter of the field had descended the steep hill on which the covert is situated. Then it became a matter of doubt as to which side of the line to ride—whether keeping to the left for the Coplow or to the right for Quenby. Cunning prompted the former course; the pack pointed the latter—and we know, from frequent and bitter experience, which is the better indicator. Be this as it may, not a dozen of that large field were in the position of riding to hounds after they passed Quenby Hall and crossed the valley for Ingarsby. The stream at the bottom is not a terrific jump; but it holds a certain depth of muddy water, and its aspect is not made more attractive to timid horseflesh by a dead-thorn fence on the landing side. Besides, there had already been ten minutes' severe galloping over chopping ridge-and-furrow and ground like putty. So horse after horse scotched and slipped and landed clumsily upon the thorns; and none jumped clean and cleverly. Among the small number of riders near hounds were at least four ladies; and these, whether by accident or by tribute of *place aux dames*, issued from the high fence preceding the brook in a string, to charge the stream in like order. No. 1 got over best of the whole party; No. 2 landed with a struggle, and in safety; but No. 3, as well mounted and accomplished, remained poised so long—with horse's forefeet on the far bank and hindlegs planted on nothing—that no alternative remained but a faint scream, and a too audible splash. Oh, Mr. Editor,

why was it not my close-cropped and unworthy head that dipped backward into that cool-running stream? The sun was warm, but the water and the breeze were terribly cold—and *I* am no longer young nor fair.

But the railway, more than the rivulet, furnished the cord of the hunt. It baffled the field, and may have influenced a faint hearted fox, though it put no impediment in the way of hounds. "Your blessed, crabbed railways spoil your Quorn country!" quoth a well-known optimist of the adjoining Hunt. But he omitted, from some accident of memory, to emphasize the fact that he and the railway and the hounds had all been playing at cross purposes throughout. So on his own hypothesis he was doubtless right; but this did not prevent a quick pack from doubling back with their fox from Keyham and killing him right handsomely close to where he had first got up—all horses beat, and never a check from the find.

This was only the beginning; for the sun went down, and hope sprung up. But it was the end also, for ne'er another fox was to be found, and the afternoon ended in a roadside gallop

home. A pleasing point in the day was the return to Melton of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Paget. One swallow may not make a summer, but the earlier birds herald the approaching flock ; and so, from this and other signs that reach us, it seems reasonable to hope for the speedy return of many Meltonians that have been beguiled to hunt elsewhere. It is safe to assert that they have not *all* profited by their change of quarters ; and, though none of us wish to see Leicestershire fields any larger than at present, I venture to ask—not of a single season's merit—but if in a term of ten years a higher average of good and pleasurable hunting is to be had anywhere else ? If the answer be Yes, pray let the scene be pointed out, and the country that is at least *good enough from year to year* be thinned for our comfort. Speaking of absentees, though, brings one's thoughts at once to Mr. Little-Gilmour, the oldest by far of those whose names are linked with Melton. His kindly face and pleasant courteous greeting have been absent from the covert-side all this season ; and it is quite doubtful whether the hardest rider, and gentlest man, of his generation will ever take the saddle again.

Cruel indeed is it to have lost, through frost and snow, several days out of the final month of hunting. Better March dust than March debility, on the part of a season hitherto so hearty and vigorous. That snow should have stood in the way of Great Dalby on Friday and Pickwell on Saturday—that frost should have prevented Six Hills on Monday and Launde Abbey on Tuesday—is hard upon unphilosophic minds pinning all their faith to a pursuit that, after all, is frivolously dependent upon mere details of weather. March is the month of all others in which we least care to see hunters standing idle in the stable. From other causes—the hundred and one accidents of the hunting field—there are only too likely to be some taking a rest already. And singularly unappetising do these look—their coats disfigured with all sorts of queer patches

and scratches, their legs in all manner of shapes, and their corn bills perhaps unpaid. We see none of this, and think nothing of it, if only we can get out hunting on something else, till the time comes for closing the season—and paying up. Now we can just achieve a daily canter in a sunny field, and thus keep circulation and digestion going in spite of the north wind and mid-day luncheons. Thus, too, we keep the residue of the stable ready for the day when the snowdrifts shall have melted and frost lost its hold where the hedgerows shelter. And what then? Three weeks, perhaps, with good luck, and a generous management. Well, we have seen many a good gallop in March, even in April. Why should we not again?

SADDLE OR SALMON.

Wednesday, March 14.—Welcome is a day's hunting after a week of abstinence and many many hours of grumbling. The Belvoir came to Croxton Park, though the hillsides were streaked with snow, and though it was still matter for a council of war as to where hunting might be most possible. The younger half of Melton had put themselves under the leadership of science and maturity, and had gone off to the Quorn and Donnington Hunt Steeplechases—as if the hunting season was all before them. A sage majority preferred to swallow the north wind with the help of saddle and sandwiches, rather than of salmon and champagne, with, perhaps, the loss of various tenners—and a run. "My dear fellow, Coston Covert to Gunby Gorse! what more do you want?" This the minority had to face on their return; and were made to take in as much of it as they would. For all their well-fed incredulity, it was true—as far as the point (some five miles) was concerned—and all praise to Gillard and the Belvoir pack that it was so. Little scent, but a good fox, made the distance. The ploughs were clotty; and the grass was rotten in its half-thawed state. The former carried no scent at all; but the latter did its duty by

hounds fairly—if it be remembered that when the grass came the fox had gone far ahead. We started in a snow storm, and rode upwards to more and more snow and ice as if ascending a mountain-side. But many others, from the Cottesmore, the Quorn, and home country, did the same—and the whole were assembled under the auspices of the Duke (alas, only in his carriage) before one o'clock. Two o'clock found us, and the fox, at Coston Covert—and there was once again the same hurried, splashing start. It came to nothing, though, but a five fields' ring back to covert. A second rather wider ring was in progress, when another fox in view set the whole field in a glow—and this was the traveller. He nearly slipped them at Wymondham by running a road; but perseverance, and a knowledge of the whereabouts of Woodwell Head, put this all right, and his line was carried briskly on. But I have to confess to the racegoers that, well worked and indefatigable as was the onward progress, this was *not* a great occasion missed. We should all have been in at the death, had there been one—and that there was not, was mainly due to the day. In Ireland it would have been described as a “moighty conversational hunt.” Like harriers, we fling our tongues most on a cold scent. On a hot one, we have little to say beyond whispering soft nothings to heedless steeds—and (have you ever had occasion to notice?) men always come at a big fence with a set expression, always with their mouths open, and generally with every feature awry. We jumped no big fences to-day—though we hunted for nearly two hours. But everybody jumped little ones and as many as he or she could.

A little field, but a field of class and talent—churchmen, soldiers, civilians, and farmers—rode the run, welcomed all that was put before them, and under some special care came to no serious grief in snowdrift or on frosted bank—though deep ground and hard ground gave its evidence at every fence during the second hour.

THE FARMERS' BENEVOLENT.

ONCE again let me call the attention of hunting men to the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution and its object. The association has been created with a view to assisting farmers, or their widows, on their attaining sixty years of age—should circumstances have left them in destitution and their character be unimpeached. The cases demanding such help must constantly be cropping up, must be only too patent to everyone who has had the opportunity of watching farming and its vicissitudes in recent years; and to no class should such distress appeal more strongly than to us who take our pleasure through the good feeling and true English sympathies of the farmers. We shall soon be making up our accounts for the season past. In that reckoning the addition of a guinea will make no difference to anyone who can afford to hunt at all. That guinea may mean a week's living to the man (or his wife), who, for the good "custom of the country" has cheered you on to his farm, built up his gaps without a grumble and mended his rails gladly—because he himself had taken his turn with hounds as long as he could, and, when he couldn't, still loved to see the hunt about.

May I put it thus? You who ride over Leicestershire to "compete" (not, I mean, in any spirit of mere personal rivalry, but that from day to day you may see hounds as well as your comrades), you like the sound of cracking timber, and are quietly delighted that you were first to carry away the oxer for your hesitating friends. You never yet cut out the work for ten minutes, without your career having left its mark on the woodwork of some good-natured farmer.

We, again, who "go round" whenever we can—have we not trodden a shameful amount of unnecessary ground; have we always left gates as we found them; have we not sometimes even stooped to the iniquity of pulling down a gap, because it was stiffer than our craven hearts desired? And for all this you and I have ever been greeted and welcomed—as forming

part and parcel of a merry sport and a happy institution that the farmers take pride in maintaining. No one whose pleasure is thus earned should, or will, in return grudge support to *their* institution. "A pound a minute" we often, in the heyday of our youth, say that a run is worth. Give a minute or two, gentlemen, to the old age of those who help you to it!

SCRAPTOFT HALL AT TEA-TIME FOR MAN AND FOX.

ON Friday, March 16th, Barkby Gorse was drawn in a heavy snowstorm, that had slackened but little before hounds opened in the Holt adjoining. But in spite of this comfortless interference, the next half-hour was better fun than we have had since this Siberian spring first set in. The old happy ground between Barkby Holt and Scraptoft was to be traversed; and much of it was done in the hurry that we have learned to look upon as so vitally essential to a run over good country. (Lest the term may read wrong, understand that speed, not haste, is inferred by hurry.) The pack were at one end of the little wood, when fox went away at the other: so he had all the best of the start. But this gave everyone a position in the run—and a position that each and all seemed determined to maintain. They rode all the harder that they scarcely saw where they were going. Big fences (and even, I am told, a deep and dirty pond) looked feasible through the driving snow. I am happy to say I witnessed no such casualty as that of the pond—nor am I, after two days' scrutiny, inclined to give credit to the story, for few wardrobes in March can boast of two really presentable pinks. I did notice, however, that the most keen of all and forward as any in the run were clad neither in scarlet nor buckskin, but were a knot of hard-riding farmers, with Mr. Simpkin of Hoby their leader on his merits as on his age. So the run went a fast hunting pace over a sweet country till Humberstone Village was reached. After this

nothing more could be made of it, till as hounds were homeward bound it was told that their hunted fox was in the laurels of Scraptoft Hall. There he was left, and there he lay till morning.

On Saturday, 17th, so much snow lay on the ground at the breakfast time of reasonably early people, that the meets of both Quorn and Belvoir were dependent entirely upon those who make no plans till the day is fairly entered upon. The latter found themselves in leathers at the regulation hour for a twelve o'clock meet, they only took the subject of snow into consideration about the time it began to solve itself, and when the earlier people had already counter-ordered their horses—condemning them to water and exercise. The Quorn were at Wimeswold, with half a dozen followers—Wimeswold being a point on the neutral zone separating (may I say it inoffensively ?) fashion from forest. I mean that it is a meet balancing between a rough country and the grass—and, if to-day's experience pointed right, bigotry alone keeps the gay grasshoppers away. For a prettier line could scarce be chosen than that taken by the bold (or frightened) fox of the afternoon ; viz., from Bunny Park to Willoughby. The same Master, pack, and huntsmen tracked him, unencumbered by a Friday mob. They could not guarantee a scent ; but they showed half the line of their great Oakley Wood run of the previous week, and we were forced to jump half the fences of that day. So perhaps it was a happy occurrence that no fox turned up till two o'clock—by which time all material trace of snow had disappeared. Stanford Park failed for a first time ; and Hoton New Spinney evolved nothing of more interest than the gambol of an old carriage horse. The latter had of late descended from his high degree to take his place between humbler shafts ; but had fallen by good luck into the hands of one who owned an heirloom in the shape of a saddle, a snaffle bridle, and a sturdy sporting heart. So the old horse was improvised into a hunter. The situation might be novel ; but was at all events less irksome to him than pulling manure. So he resigned himself to it with complacency if not with absolute

enthusiasm; and took his part with the others in parading a muddy lane while strange sounds betokened a covert being drawn. But this over, he was told to wade into and through a deep banked bottom below the spinney, and to lift his master some twelve feet up the boggy ascent out of the rivulet. This to the untutored mind was no mere pleasant variation of labour, far less a recreation—nay, it was an insult to education and profession that even knotted whipcord had never implied. And he resented it; down went his aged head; up went his venerable back—and the wicked perverter of destiny was shot comfortably back into the bog from which he had just been carried.

In this country, if a poor man catches our horse, we always give a coin if we've got it, a courteous blessing if we haven't. I got only the last; but with it a hearty mutual laugh, and an explanation. "He's a tricky old dog, he is. He's served me this way afore when I've took him hunting. You see I ain't got much of a bridle, and he catches me unawares-like."

Monday, March 19, with the Quorn fixing Great Dalby in place of a meet north of the Wreake, gave Gartree Hill for the morning, and Barkby Holt for the afternoon—the distant combination resulting in a day's sport nearly first-rate. A trifle more scent would have raised it to quite that standard; for foxes were found readily, travelled readily, and in the main chose a good country. The wind still hailed from somewhere in the north, with a piercing venom that declared itself most on the way home. But the frost of previous nights had waned away—or confined itself to the higher ground of Tilton, &c., which just came within a day's doings. Of course there can be little morning, when you are called to the meet at 12—and when nobody turns up till 12.30—but the first run is always dubbed the morning event. To-day it began at once, with a vixen and two others setting off in close company up the Little Dalby Hill—and all plainly to be seen squatting and hesitating as they met the populace on the hill top. Result, some confusion and no little delay. For in his career—whether as the cause or effect of his shortcoming—Reynard was continually running his head

against some new agent of danger. Now it was carriages or second horsemen, then it was a shepherd, and next, and worst—it was a shepherd's dog with a turn of speed quite on a par with that possessed by poor Reynard himself. In the two former cases he was turned easily within the huntsman's keen range of vision; and hounds were of course clapped mercilessly on to his brush. In the last instance he underwent a most severe course under the eyes of the whole body of pursuers, being turned at least three times in one field and hotly pursued into the far distance, by a black sheepdog who apparently meant to wreak full vengeance on poor pug for sporting a brush while he had none. However, pug scored on that very point; for a whisk of his heavy brush brought him round far quicker than could the two inches of stump owned by his opponent. Then a fierce succession of hills and valleys cleared the Punchbowl and led between Burrough and Somerby—and now a run was a certainty, for a fox could scarcely double back against a field that had gathered from the four winds and—a close chain, at least a mile broad—were sweeping him before them. The pace, in and out of these grassy dips, was all that horses could do. And so three fields of plough, carrying not even a suspicion of scent, were very welcome to three-fourths of those interested. Then came a sudden infusion of vigour—and then, after a couple of miles of easy grass luxury, the Twyford Brook. This ought to have been a luxury, too; in many cases may have been so. But the miserable instinct that would seem to paralyse Leicestershire horses on such occasions was only too rampant here. A hundred of them achieved the feat of jumping twelve feet of space, and six or seven feet of gurgling water. Thirty others dipped in, rolled in, and disgraced themselves, because they did not care to jump at all. I know the taste of that Twyford water well—and it is quite as nasty as other waters. But my chief abhorrence to it, applicable equally, perhaps, to all other water, is that it ought never to be tasted at all. It is no river of Damascus, but, except in time of flood, is a meagre stream that a three-pound trout would despise. Yet there have been more

stirrup leathers, more flasks, and more reputations lost in that easy flowing stream (one of the very few honest bank-to-bank water jumps that Leicestershire owns) than all the brooks of Aylesbury could account for.

To-day's was a lovely picture. 'Twould be too personal by far for me to set on paper. A painter might have made of it a canvas-subject to include as many portraits as foregather in the well-known Bond-street picture of the Four-in-Hand Meet (and have stood a very good chance of getting his head punched afterwards for liberties taken and truisms conveyed). On right side or wrong, writer hurried from a scene, of which white breeches planted on the bank, and snorting horses declining to be rescued were the leading features. But the water was shallow—and those who got in so readily emerged with almost equal facility, weighing possibly an extra twenty pounds of mud and water. A check on the hillside beyond formed the field into two parties (no one for the moment looked at the hounds), representing respectively the pride of success and the humility of failure. The upper ten looked back with highly unbecoming merriment on the confusion below, and greeted each fresh comer with unseemly chaff on what should have been matter for anxious condolence. But that black mud was sadly against appearance or dignity, and entirely set aside any vain attempt at maintaining either. Fortunately, hounds quickly started on again, and the two sections (the elated and the humiliated) again merged into a common body, to meet the still smaller brook at Marfield. To this, I fancy, we were all equal. But soon afterwards John o' Gaunt was passed; and beyond Tilton Village nothing could be done—if we except the proved possibility of slipping up on the icy hillsides by Lord Moreton's (no, I learn it is properly Lord Aberdour's) Covert.

The Master then left the half-frozen neighbourhood of Billesdon Coplow, and ordered Barkby Holt as the next point of appeal. The old traveller of Friday was back already; and this afternoon they made him stride along to a more sprightly tune than before. He left covert along the bordering lane;

and, with ninety-nine hundredths of the field drawn up at the farthest corner of the holt, he might have run his course with no other followers than the pack and its staff. But with gallant courtesy he went at once to the left, to meet the hurrying throng; and so fifty men were enabled to take up the challenge and ride to his lead. Fence for fence and gap for gap he took them, by Barkby Thorpe Spinney, to Humberstone Village—the difference in the direction of his start counter-balancing the extra pace, and leaving the time the same as on the previous occasion. Again he virtually beat them in half an hour—this time mainly through the intervention of what the daily forecast had set down mildly as a “cold shower,” which in fact meant a bitterly drenching rain from the north-east.

But the huntsman did not fail to remember how his fox had laid up to laugh in his brush after the hunt of Friday; so set to work at once to make good the laurels and then the gorse at Scraptoft. Nothing apparently came of the search; and other memories acting upon the hungry and thirsty, many of these trooped as before into the hospitable portals of the Hall. In the middle of the comforting process which was to fortify them for a long wet journey—in most cases up the piercing wind—came a simultaneous rush to the window, with a snatching-up of hats, whips, and half-finished glasses. Reynard was stealing across the lawn, his tongue out and his head turned over his shoulder. The whole party issued to scream and holloa; while the terriers took up the line and dashed into the shrubs. A moment more, and out he came again—Snap and Pincher close at his brush, having run their game into a *cul de sac* formed by iron railings and wire netting. The luncheon-eaters hurried to the stables, to jump into their saddles and gallop forth, with girths still loose and faces beaming in justice to the good things within. Hounds, just turning homeward, were quickly brought up by the babel of sound, and almost met their fox as he crossed the road from the shrubberies. For three fields they scurried after him; but in three more the driving storm completely choked them off—and the Barkby Holt fox again slept in safety.

Happy they who rode home down the same high wind and not against it—and happy we who can now, within four good walls and outside one fair bottle, listen complacently to as searching a blast as ever found out the fractures of seasons past. “Newmarket sweaters” are a garment now accepted both in name and practice by the most gentle authority; and their value to-day was as pronounced and universal as their colouring.

A COOL, QUICK, PENULTIMATE.

COLD nights and drying winds seemed to have brought fox-hunting almost to its end, but for southerly wind of the date.

Far better have been a volunteer marching to Brighton than a foxhunter frozen out of his Easter holiday. The cold that stirs the one to activity condemns the other to grumbling idleness when he can least afford it. Look at the date! March 24th. Where shall you all be on April 24th? You will each go your way—though the ways of many may lie in the least healthful, if not fascinating, direction of all, a London season. Recklessly, wastefully, many of us throw away a week in November, a day in December—yet cling to every hour that is now slipping out of grasp. Foxhunting after all is but a type—a vivid and tolerably guileless type—of manhood’s experience. If manhood counted no worse temptations, no worse thoughts, than are contained in hunting six days a week, there would be but little wilful evil perpetrated—and suffered wrongs would be much less hotly felt than now. Fox-hunting is selfish, they say. Is money-making unselfish? The devotee in each case spends the bulk of his time, and the main of his energy, apart, in his own fashion and in pursuance of his own object. In which does he do his fellow-labourer least harm? Which sends him home with a clearer conscience, with pleasanter thought of the day or with more appreciativeness of home—a home that would probably have thanked him but little for his idle presence throughout the day.

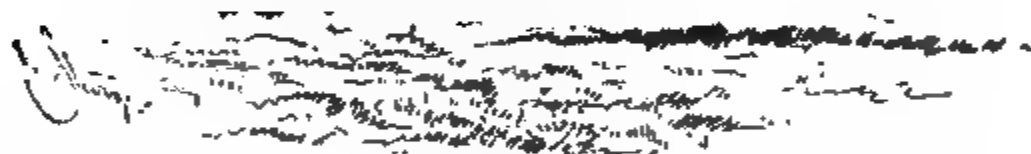
But Leicestershire should be the head of no sermon. It is merely the heading of a daily record.

Sunshine and snow made up half of Monday, March 26, with the Quorn. Sunshine, a rattling scent, and a brilliant scurry completed the day. Ellars Gorse, as I will tell, made the evening what it was. Lodge on the Wolds gave the meet, and the earlier and rougher play. Easter Monday broke with a bright cold glare that should have done credit to Brighton. It lit us on our distant road to Lodge on the Wolds (distant from everywhere, but this season generally the most fortunate of meets). The old Fosse Road forms here the last joint of the telescope to all who look from Leicestershire; and it focussed a queer scene at somewhere about 12.30 to-day. The broad green boggy lane stretched onwards from Widmerpool, far as the eye could reach. The far distance had a cloud background of inky darkness, while against this the scarlet and sunlit figures of late comers absolutely sparkled. We had been frozen in for days. Now there was a sudden break-up in snowstorm and sun. The work of to-day had hardly begun ere the flakes dropped so heavily that in half an hour the landscape was white as in typical winter, men and trees and soil draped thickly in a chilly shroud. In weal often and in woe occasionally, I have hunted before on this quasi-neutral territory between the shires of Leicester and Nottingham. But Lodge on the Wolds has got up its name; and never has it been my lot to witness such a goodly gathering as on this Easter Monday. A list of names is not as a rule instructive. In this instance—however incomplete—it will go to show how easily is appreciativeness begotten, and expectancy aroused, by recent events. Not only had all the Quorn trooped in; but the South Nottinghamshire had apparently agreed with one accord not to let slip such a chance. There were, I remember, among many others—and in addition to the Master and his son—Lord Belper and Miss Strutt, Major and Mrs. Robertson, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Paget, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Chaplin, Cols. Forester, Chippindall, and Percy, Major Robertson, Capts. Ashton, Boyce, Smith, Messrs Behrens, Brooks of Whatton, Cradock, W. and

E. Chaplin, Cecil Chaplin, Charlton, Martin, O. Paget, Pennington, Pryor, Story, Whitworth, Black, Brewster, Marshall, Simpkin, Smith, &c., with many more from over the border.

Owthorpe Borders has lately been a common and frequent playground for the men of both counties. Now again there was a fox ready to hand. Mr. Coupland set things in motion without regard to the carpet of snow that might well have frightened him to delay; and the usual local merry-go-round ensued. With a scent almost inappreciable, Firr and his pack worked away; while the field hovered quietly on the hill-tops, and awaited the turn of events. The turn did not come at the Curate; for the only inmate of the gorse was a heavy vixen. Then upon Ellars Gorse—with its recent histories and achievements fresh in memory—hung the fate and merit of the day. Hounds were this time thrown into the little covert on its brookside or north-eastern edge; and so Reynard was cut off altogether from his former course toward the Vale of Belvoir. An even sixpence they don't find him: a guinea to a sixpence they dust him if they do. Hounds already three parts through the sprouting gorse and low-levelled thorn—never a sound—and the odds on the former point rapidly, dismally, rising. For, Ellars Gorse a blank, where are they to draw, with a reasonable chance of finding? But hold, what has become of the whip at the top corner? See, his upheld cap is glancing above the fence, as he dashes across the upper end of the covert! Now for it!! The snowstorms have travelled on, the evening sky is clear, and the northerly breeze is cool but quiet. Hounds are out of covert almost before their fox is over the little meadow above, while in feverish eagerness men rush round to be with them. It is the old, old story—the familiar exciting scene—a dash for a start, a loose-off of pent-up eagerness, a draught of excitement that we have drunk so often, and that we hope to quaff many and many a time again. On this occasion the rush is not that of numbers—as of a crowd competing for freedom from a burning theatre (or to be more material, from Barkby Holt through a handgate)—but to get

forward fast enough, with no difficulties to encounter but the pace. Firr's horn sends out one shrill blast as he gallops up the meadow with the tail hounds—and a dozen riders swing over the two fences to join him as he issues on to the wide-grassed road above. The pack dash down the roadside towards Willoughby; then, in a couple of hundred yards glide through the side fence, and seem to slip out of grasp at once. Indeed for the next five-and-twenty minutes the best-mounted and



most determined of enemies could not jump on their backs; for they made all their own running, and won in a canter at Shoby Scoles. Having started close at their fox, he never got away from them, till he popped underground just before them.

Over grass and over plough alike they raced—turning and twisting as they went, whether in the open field or as their fox dodged up a hedgerow. The pace and the short quick turns threw out many men who would, and perhaps should, have been with them. For instance, that first broad road carried several over the mark, at the moment when—attended closely by the huntsman, Capt. Smith, and Mr. Cecil Chaplin—the pack struck off to the left, to race over a field or two of grass and deep fresh-sown pieces of plough. Over the latter hounds could go much faster than horses; and they were well in front when,

as they neared the village of Wymesfold, a second sharp leftward turn (hidden by a high black bullfinch) served to throw off some more of the van. But the same turn helped others—as it struck into a second road—and so the number with hounds at once increased rather than diminished. This road led direct to Six Hills; and had men chosen to stick to it, would have led them to Six Hills as quickly as hounds did. But the latter took them at once across into capital riding ground; and, at the best pace they could raise, the leaders reached the gorse field at the cross roads of Six Hills only just within hail. Darting at once through the narrow plantation that stretches thence to the wood of Thrussington Wolds, and leaving that covert to the right, hounds held on still over the open. A labourer pointed not only to the line of the fox, but to his fleeting form, as he could still see him only a field ahead. At this point Mr. Black, a hard rider and good sportsman, who farms land near Great Dalby, took up the running in pursuit of the pack, closely followed by Capt. Boyce, Mr. Cecil Chaplin, and the huntsman. To Mr. Chaplin, indeed, and to his roan, belong the honours of as sharp and trying a ride as has been seen this season. For, with no slight disadvantage in point of weight, he saw more of the gallop than all the lighter men—a knowledge and faculty of pace, and (a still more invaluable talent) *a quick eye to hounds*, preventing his either blowing his horse or making a single wrong turn. Others too were yet well in the run, as it left Ragdale Hall and village to the right, and went parallel to the Six Hills and Melton Road—some of the earliest of these being Major Robertson, Messrs. Whitworth, Pennington, Cradock, Story, and Colonel Chippindall. But the attendance was but a small one when hounds, dashing right up to the open earth, brought this bright gallop to a sudden close. Twenty-seven minutes to ground, and not a check, nor even a moment's falter, by the way—the ground in beautiful order, and the fences easy. The extreme points of the burst (from near Wymeswold to Shobby Scoles) were not quite four miles; but the way hounds went must have been fully six.

A CHOKING FINISH.

DUSTY, oppressive, and hot as was Monday, April 2nd, it credited the month with a run that would have graced any part of the season's calendar. It had opened with a meet of the Quorn at Egerton Lodge, Lord Wilton's picturesque hunting box at the entrance to Melton Mowbray; and Melton being now the junction point of so many railways, it is not to be wondered at that visitors trooped in from distant quarters for this, the final, and almost annual, show meet of the Quorn. Yet, for all that the season is so nearly over, there was no giant muster of riders—the reason probably being that the rapidly hardening ground has been putting stables to a sorer trial than all the deep going of the past winter. And among those who came out there came a summery, jaunty style of dress and deportment altogether out of keeping with the serious occupation of foxhunting as it absorbs us in midwinter. Light tweed coats had in many cases taken the place of pink, and thin cord did the work of buckskin. Faces flushed hotly under the burning sun, even during the easy saunter to a noonday meet; and the rosebud of spring fashion became a full-blown flower ere the buttonhole had carried it half the day. Men talked of a Newmarket future rather than a Melton present; and steeplechasing, not unnaturally, was a still more general topic. For had we not among us to-day—for the second year in immediate succession—a Leicestershire hunting-man, the rider and owner of the winner in the greatest of steeplechasers? Last year it was Lord Manners; while this year, Count Kinsky, who owes all his quickness over a country to his Melton experience, had returned to undergo, at the hands of his fellow comrades, a shower of congratulations as hearty—and probably as welcome—as any his well-won victory will have called forth. Among the townsfolk of Melton, who to a man, woman, or child had turned out to the meet, the hero of The Liverpool was an object of quite as general an interest as even the hounds. So crowded was the main street and the paddock opposite Egerton Lodge, that it

was difficult to believe a meet of foxhounds and not a race meeting had called us thither. Indeed, the progress of Firr and his satellite, as in scarlet array they rode down the lane of people, was suggestive of nothing less than the pomp of Ascot.

But, soon after one o'clock and after a hot dusty ride along what is known as Sandy Lane, the field were marshalled on Gartree Hill, "with the bustling pack at their feet" in the covert below. Then, after various alarms, they scattered in pursuit for a broiling quarter of an hour after what may, or may not, have been a vixen, but which at all events meant to go no further than it could help. This fox to ground, the same covert was called on for another. While it was being drawn, the needful animal suddenly came from the open country, ran amuck through the mass of shouting horsemen, and insisted on making his way into the covert. It took ten minutes more to persuade him that this was no quiet sanctuary, and then he took his way over the opposite hill, between the village and hall of Little Dalby. Of course we all knew the outer geography of Little Dalby; so at once took the road round, avoiding garden complications, and met the pack with heads up in the field next the Punchbowl.

On happy information Firr acted at once; and to his quick and pushing readiness the run was owing. He bored his way into that wire-kempt field, so familiar and hateful, that bars Little Dalby from Leesthorpe; and immediately the play altered, the scene changed, and vigour succeeded tameness. Hounds dropped their noses to some purpose; and sped over the grass at a rate we could scarcely equal on the road—which, for sin or stupidity, we had nearly all preferred, for moments meant, for minutes compelled. A most useful agent is a road, and never more so than in a quick run (if the eye too be quick enough to cut the indulgence short at the right second); but a road in dust and heat and crowd forms an exasperating, demoralising, lowering situation that degrades foxhunting to the level of—cart and aniseed. But so it was now for a clattering half mile; so it was again after the two fields of bridleroad

had been set to the good. And then the landmark of the Noel Arms (once a pothouse on the Melton and Oakham Road) was reached. Oh, how hot we were ! Oh, how we hated macadam ! Oh, how mean seemed those last ten minutes ! ! ! But here we were with hounds—and very few honest men before us. Two ploughed fields, instead of bringing respite to Reynard, had brought him across the scuffler and the drill. (Alas, 'twas but yesterday we leaped barley stooks after the early cubs), and the huntsman could cut a corner almost on to his back. Once over the Oakham road, the half assured run was made a certainty. Only grass in front ; and quite scent enough—for hounds were close at their game, and the fences sufficiently strong and close to forbid any over-riding. Passing just short of Whissendine Village, it was easy to recognize many a wide-set difficulty that had oftentime made its impress on shallow courage, as we shirked it with the Cottesmore. Now we found ourselves crossing the Stapleford and Whissendine road ; and so we neared Stapleford, gasping much, delighted more, but wondering most—that a gallop was given us to-day. Firr pushed up the road ; the pack drove hard up the grass field alongside ; and the plantations of Stapleford Park were looming across the valley. But a wide dry fallow led down the slope towards the brook (that we so often misterm The Whissendine). How could hounds keep up their pace over the scentless dust ? *There's* the answer—bold Reynard, beaten and blown, barely crawling over the clods ! Tallyho ! tallyho ! ! He had little chance now. The pack were clapped on to him before he reached the water ; and chased him up to the narrow spinney bordering the Park. Here he dodged wearily about for some two or three minutes after the huntsman and his followers, having forded the brook, had come up for the final scene. Then—about five and forty minutes from the time his race began—the big brown fox was stretched, an unsightly fragment, on the greensward. This was the hottest, most choking, run I remember to have seen in Leicestershire.

JACKAL HUNTING ON THE NEILGHERRIES, 1876.

FIRST, my readers, learn—if you do not know already—that the Blue Mountains are to Southern India what the Himalayas are to the North; and that hither, when the hot months of early summer approach, flee Military and Civilians to the utmost extent that the exigencies of duty will allow. Government, as represented by the head of the Madras Presidency and his satellites, move up to Ootacamund in a body, bringing with them their office clerks, papers, and peons, and ruling the country comfortably from their cool perch—after the example set them by their seniors in Bengal, whose summer seat is Simla. The editors of local papers in the plains take no small exception to this course; but it should be remembered that their virtuous indignation is fanned by the very hottest of breezes, and that they find it impossible to move their type and talents and join in the general exodus. Deprived of this privilege, they are much prone at this season to cast such missiles as their pens afford them against—and so, in one sense at least, to “make it hot” for—those who sit in office on a higher and pleasanter level. Not that your correspondent is a government official. No such luck! There are but two other kinds of men in India—the military man and the merchant. The former makes no rupees, while the latter absolutely loses them; whereas the “civilian” lives on the fat of the land while out there, returning home at forty or thereabouts to enjoy the “fruits of his labour” in the shape of a pension that will make him almost as much a man of mark at Cheltenham or Clifton as he was at Calcutta or Madras.

So his Grace the Governor betakes himself and adherents to Ootacamund, where, seven thousand five hundred feet above the sea, Fashion has chosen her summer resort. His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief does the same, and smaller fry of every degree follow suit—all alike rejoicing to breathe more freely as they emerge from the sweltering plains below. Thus a varied and pleasant society is formed at Ootacamund and Coonoor (which nestle some twelve miles apart); and here people endeavour to forget they are in India. Even many of the time-honoured idiosyncrasies of Indian society are left behind, and men and women become more English-like and less colonial. The quaint and fantastic exactions of the world *à l'Indienne* being more or less laid aside, we are able to move and live more as we were wont in Lesser Britain, ignoring the fungus laws of custom, nor even bending as we have been taught at the pretentious shrine of the god Rupee.

Where Indian crotchets and Indian idleness are at a discount, and the climate is almost English, it is scarcely to be wondered at that a body of Englishmen, assembled avowedly in search of recreation and health, should seek their amusement in accordance with their native tastes; and, accordingly, nothing could be more natural than that the grass-covered slopes of these undulating tablelands should prove suggestive of the hound and the horn.

Thus is it that hunting has come about on the summits of the Neilgherries, where, eighty years ago, Tippoo Sultan was the only individual who could boast of a summer residence on these charming highlands; and the sambur and the bison had no worse enemy than the cheetah and the tiger. Now, and for years past, a railway brings us to the very foot of the hills; and a day's scramble (on pony back, or borne in a tonjon by coolies) brings us to a completely different sphere, but one peopled for the time by scores of our late perspiring and emaciated friends.

The roar of the tiger is now seldom heard within twenty miles of Ootacamund; the bison has chosen other ranges whereon to pick the sweet spring grasses; the sambur stags are

now scarcely numerous enough to allow of the picnics *à la chasse* so popular here: but the jackal remains in wondrous stoutness and abundance, and merrily and happily do the hill-sides ring in his honour. There is no fairer turf on any of the downs of the old country. Tilton or Burrough (believe me, my well-loved friends of High Leicestershire) carry no such consistent blaze of scent; and Owston Wood never bred a stouter varmint than we have on the Neilgherries. Yes, and we have a decent pack of hounds besides—*more than decent* for India—thirty-two couple, well bred, and in working order, beautifully various as to size and shape, and representing almost every kennel in the United Kingdom. Yet among them we can pick out some sixteen couple that might be trotted to covert anywhere, or with whom we might even offer a provincial M.F.H. the questionable luxury of “a day on the flags” (provided always he arrived in time to lunch and brown sherry with us first). We should first draw for him our five couple from the Quorn, and show him, with no little pride, how nobly Mr. Coupland could treat his friends at a distance. We should bore him with a yarn of little point of how we had seen that badger-pied bitch lead the Meltonians slowly on, on into the ploughs of Nottinghamshire, when but for her nose they would have been on their way to try for a second fox on the grass; and we would assure him how nothing but her colour had exiled her from Quorndon. We should dilate on the symmetry of these Midland ladies as they coquet to his greeting; while with folded arms we should leave to his common sense the expression of praise on these grand dogs, in each wistful eye of whom is written as plain as words, “Oh, *why* was I sent to Asia—I who was walked at Barkby, and first tasted fox from the Coplow?” We should then show him the ten couple selected from the late Madras pack, refer all his questions on their merits to Veerasawmy, our black kennel huntsman, who is ready, as opportunity offers, to declare the wildest or mutest of them all “that best hound ever come Madras side, sare.” Next we should produce the three couple of home-bred ones, and tell

him, in all veracity, that these were found to hunt with more drive, and to stand the climate infinitely better than any of the imported ones. Ugly and ill-shaped as they are, they are certainly little demons to dash along on a scent; but then, unfortunately, it has been found almost impossible to rear them anywhere but in the hills, and difficult even there. Well, after proving to him that we have a smart-looking bitch from the Pytchley, a neat one from the Cottesmere, and endeavouring continually to "force" him with our specimen cards, we pass hurriedly over the last arrivals, who have been hunting at Calcutta—and show it; and the state of whose skins still necessitates separate lodging. This concluded, we should ask him whether to be called at five o'clock A.M. would give him time to dress for our opening meet; and eventually, with his concurrence and yours, reader, we would all three appear on the lawn in front of the residence of his Grace the Duke of Buckingham at 6.15 A.M. on Friday, April 7.

We love our beds dearly; but we love sport still better, and so are compelled to this miserably early hour by considerations of sun and scent. The air on the Neilgherries is at all times cool. At dawn it is thoroughly chilly; but for all that we are not too many degrees from the equator, and the sun will remind us of this before nine o'clock. The dew will have disappeared by then, too, and scarcely six showers have fallen in the last six months. Still we know the mossy turf will ride soft and safe, and so we are willing to pin our trust to the glistening dew-drops.

The meet is not a lengthy proceeding. There are no dandies here, alas! to bring their specimens of snowy white and spotless pink into competition. No; toilettes are unambitious—scarcely workmanlike, while at such an hour the voice of gossip is still, and even the lips of beauty part not, save it be in a sleepy request for coffee. A table is laid for all who desire stimulant or refreshment; but there are no big fences hereabouts, so there is little call upon the former, and the power that can "nerve the enervate, make the dastard bold," may lie dormant so far as our fenceless downs are concerned.

Now we move on to draw, not a snug square of blackthorn or privet, but the bare hill sides, where haply we may light upon Master Jack returning from his midnight prow. This is how we find our jackals—at least, this is how we get our runs; for, if we can hit upon him thus, we start close upon our game, and he will make his way straight as an arrow, and well nigh as swift, to his point among those wooded rocks in the distance. You may draw these sholaks, as the thickly-timbered glens that run up the mountain sides are termed; but they are too dense to give hounds a chance, and once in them you are likely to remain there till time to go home again.

On our way we may just try this gorse-fringed valley that we pass, but chiefly for the sake of seeing the familiar yellow flower shake as the pack thread the bushes. We are not disappointed at failing to find here, but keep our eyes vigilantly open as we rise the opposite hill, on which the damp and mossy turf is



glittering like silver in the rising sun. A find on this open ground is almost necessarily a view, for Jack ever moves leisurely homewards, and, though he leaves a screaming scent behind him, every vestige of it will die away in a few brief minutes. "There

he goes, there he goes !” Hold up your bat, sir, and for goodness sake don’t holloa ; for, renowned a pack as are the Ootacamund Hounds, they are but mortal after all. It is no slight luck that they dash across the line at once, catch it up with a swing, and are off with a noise and sparkle that do them credit. Indeed, they *start* with an undeniable head ; though, as with many of superior degree, it must be confessed they are a little apt to lose it under difficulties. So they stream away right merrily down the sloping ground, the horse hoofs scarcely sounding on the springy grass as we fairly struggle behind them. Along the road it is, at a pace that makes the dust fly as in a gallop-past over the Bangalore maidan. Yet on they go for a mile at the best pace every hound can muster. Surely it must be “flash !” No scent could lie here ! But yes, they turn off suddenly at top speed, and rattle on unhesitatingly, testifying loudly to the sweet savour of jackal. Crooktail is leading them noisily, his twisted stern waving in frantic efforts to improve the pace. Crooktail, I must tell you, was bred and born on the Neilgherries, and consequently thinks he knows more about them than anybody else. He is not altogether a model of form, but he can travel like a steam engine, and is as faultless of nose as he is guileless of all sense of discipline. Let him lead along a line, he bears himself bravely ; but no “second fiddle” for him. The cry of other hounds is to him the signal for seeking elsewhere on his own account ; and on his return to kennel he will indulge in the most pronounced bad language to all who approach him.

However, Crooktail is in a good humour now ; and though the O. H. are rather backward in condition, each member is straining to live with him—on a scent that they must be able to see, for there is no stooping to smell. We cheer them lustily and ceaselessly (for our new hounds have as yet been scarcely entered to jack), and for two or three miles the head is no whit diminished. A jump ! ye gods, and this on the Neilgherries ! It is only a deep bush-hidden nullah, but there is a pleasant tickle to the soul in “setting him at it,” and leaning

right back in the saddle once again. "Forrard! forrard!" We *must* scream, for the good of our half-taught pack and a vent to our own enthusiasm. You might cover the first ten couple "with a sheet"—given that the sheet be large enough—as they dip down to the Segore Brook, a stony rocky streamlet, with a pretentious pool here and there. Hounds rise the other side, with the jackal not fifty yards before them; but don't imagine he is beat or even slow. It is merely a nonchalant way of his. He can make that fifty yards a hundred at any moment he chooses; and to toy with his annoyers appears to be but a pleasant pastime to this sinewy traveller. Now is the time to ride and cheer them on; but this brook will puzzle you, whether we have mounted you on our best, or you depend on the hireling of Ootacamund. In the former case, dismount and lead over the half-covered boulders. In the latter, you may, if you like, join the gallant Lancer, who is already swimming about the deepest pool, and congratulating himself on the pleasant change from the burning heat of Secunderabad. Now is the time for riding to catch 'em; and catch 'em you can't, for they can stream up a hill (at least a certain number of them) much quicker than you can mount it, work your elbows and use your spurs never so wisely or well. If you can keep the leading hounds in sight you must be riding a well-bred one—as Walers go—for, let who likes say the contrary, I venture the opinion that no Arab can live the pace, when hounds really settle to work over this hilly grass. So struggle on with the tail as best you can; hustle up to each brow, and push down each declivity; skirt the bogs in the valleys, or mark carefully the bullock crossings. We have been running half-an-hour (if a watch that has been a few months in India is to be depended on); but there is no slackening of speed—*i.e.*, horses and hounds have been throughout at their utmost, and rather more, when we enter a green sholah again in view of our jack. Gather your few couple together, and try and push him to death in covert. He has fairly beaten you and yours over the open. Well, if you can't do this, mark him to

ground amid the rocks within. Veerasawmy! where is now your cunning? Can you not tell us where there is a hole over which to shout "Who-whoop!" if but our noisy Harmony will speak. "Hark, holloa!" Our jack has been seen stretched gasping on the turf not a hundred yards ahead; but, tired as he is, he can still stretch on in front of half-conditioned hounds; and, though Dalesman of the Quorn is heaving along at his brush, the hound is absolutely too tired to seize, and Jack pops into a welcome earth under his very nose.

This was our opening day. The second was much alike, though hounds ran fast for forty-five minutes instead of thirty, with the same result in favour of Jack. We hope that condition will put us on an equality in a week or two; but, happen what will, this is a wild sporting country in which English fox-hounds are not wasted, where game is plentiful, and the problem of scent is (locally) solved. To gallop over this virgin turf is a delight, and the sport is genuine and constant.

"Twenty-five minutes, with a kill in the open, all over grass," sounds well enough almost for Leicestershire? At any rate, it has brought on such an attack of cacoethes that there is no holding me away from pen and paper, and the following must be received as a let-off to my feelings. Seven days in close succession, with a rattling gallop on each, have been crowned and climaxed by the above; and so you will grant there is at least excuse, if not occasion, for an outbreak of this kind.

At 6.30 this morning sixteen couples from the kennels above-mentioned were slowly perambulating the grassy slopes in the neighbourhood of Ootacamund—every nose in the air, every pair of eyes looking anxiously round for excuse to riot, and each individual only kept from breaking away to romp and revel by the black looks and ready whipcord of Mr. Veerasawmy. I think I have already had the pleasure of introducing this man of talent to your readers. Suffice it now to repeat that he

combines the offices of second whip and kennel huntsman to the Ooty Hunt. In the former capacity he may be said to be almost purely ornamental, his physical capabilities scarcely sufficing to enable him to retain his saddle and to attend to hounds at the same time, unless it be, as now, for the comparatively peaceful period preceding a find. In the latter rôle, however, he shines—if I may speak figuratively—like patent varnish, and is verily the most wondrous nigger that ever ate rice. He does not drink ! His lies are absolutely white beside those of his brethren ! The proof of the pudding being in the eating, his system of kennel is admirable—his hounds carrying coats like satin (and this in India too !), and being capable of a hot morning's work without a stern drooping or an appetite failing. His method of pronunciation furnishes a second complete nomenclature for the pack, which it would puzzle any stranger to identify with our own ; and he relies for his medicines entirely on some half-dozen prescriptions picked up during his seventeen years of service. The ingredients and action of these are of course entirely unknown to him ; but, as he appears to have learned the occasions for their use, and has not poisoned a hound lately, we are quite content to repose upon the result of his management, and to congratulate ourselves on the fact that ours are about the only hounds in India that can lay claim to their proper portion of hair and health. Indeed, since the commencement of our season, some ten weeks ago, there has not been an ailing hound in kennel, save an occasional sufferer from cut or bruise : so at least Mr. Veerasawmy may lay claim to the superior talent of prevention.

But to return to the pack, now slowly following a bee line across the open downs. The "fast pack" are out this morning : for, as drafting head and tail is quite out of the question in a country where a foxhound is worth his weight in rupees—aye, and more in these days of depreciation of silver and growing appreciation of sport, two causes strongly affecting us Anglo-Indians—the Master has adopted the expedient of dividing his

numbers into a fast pack and a slow one. This, of course, has to be done in total disregard of appearance, size, and sex ; but a nearer approach to uniformity in work is reached, and, by dint of leaving at home the fleetest member of the fast pack, and the two or three slowest of the slow, a very respectable result is attained. Both packs are now in the best of wind and condition ; they can carry an "elegant" head, and each hound can feel that he is taking his part in the work. Nor are they a very wild or intractable lot, though this constant drawing in the open for their game might make the steadiest old southerners somewhat flighty and skittish at starting. They are eager and excited already, no doubt ; for do they not know as well as we do that a skulking jackal may jump up at any moment under their noses ?

So, keeping them well closed up together, we search the hill-sides, scouts being sent on to each eminence, as if in an enemy's country. We give all coverts a wide berth, for in them we always fight at a disadvantage with our wily foe. The only divergence from a straight line is to the neighbourhood of a dead horse—that should be a sure find in the early morning ; But no, though his jack-enticing aroma scents the breeze to a horrible extent, and his ghastly sides show the recent ravages of the noble scavenger, we must move on still, and the sooner we do so the better.

But what is that brown spot meandering along the green brow half a mile away ? By all that's holy in sport, it's a jack ! Close up, gentlemen, but don't hurry the hounds now ! He's just over the hill and out of sight. But he's sure to wait for us. "Steady, hounds, steady !" they know "the little game" thoroughly. Everyone of them is roused almost as quickly as we are ; but they haven't caught a view, so can only look to us for the signal. Cantering slowly up the ascent, we get their noses down near the line. Yo-o-i ! yo-oi ! They fling themselves round, catch a sweet sudden whiff, to which they swing as if magnetised, then, with every tongue at its loudest, bluster noisily over the hilltop. True enough, Mr. Jack has waited for

us. He saw no pursuit and knew of no danger till he woke to the roar of the torrent pouring down upon him. In sheer amazement he waits till a bare twenty yards divides him from their noisy throats, when, seeing that these are no playful pariahs with whom to trifle or temporise, he sticks his contemptible brush out behind him, and lays his gaunt muscular form desperately along the sward. But he is playing a downhill game now in its fullest sense. Those great leathering giants that have been used to stretch over the wide Quorn pastures can cover more ground in their stride than he can; and though, with his wondrous back and loins, he could leave them easily up a hillside, he has to strain every nerve and sinew now to keep clear of their hungry jaws. Oh, that he had not done such justice to the good grey horse that Providence—or the Madras Carrying Company—had put in his way! How little had he realised, as he whetted his fangs over those succulent ribs, that he was preparing himself to point the moral and adorn a tale of self-indulgence.

No occasion for cheering them on, or giving a signal to your field now; but we give the former a scream and the latter a blast as we settle down to scurry our very fastest in pursuit. Ah, worshipful masters of England, this country has its advantages after all! No riding over hounds when they are running *here*! No scuttling forward to gates, and cutting off the pack as they turn under a hedgerow! Not the wildest citizen that ever migrated to Melton, to stick one more thorn into the already lacerated sides of Firr or Gillard, could work much mischief here. There is *always* a scent; and, as hounds most often start close at their game, it is all that the stoutest of Waler blood, sent along by the keenest and youngest of spurs, can do to live with them. Fences there are none, and this may be an advantage too, though few of us would be ingenuous enough to say so as honestly as did a youthful planter after our gallop to-day. "Dear me," quoth he, "this is my last day's hunting, for I'm off to England to-morrow!" "But you'll see ten times better hunting there," we answered by way of re-

assuring him. "How can that be?" returned young Nimrod; "aren't there a lot of fences continually in the way to spoil it?" Tell me, truthful reader, who have just pulled the first grey hair from your upper lip, would you or I, who are only now beginning to fancy that one of our stud suits us better than another—would *we* dare give utterance to a sentiment approaching this, even in the society of others older and more timorous than ourselves? Methinks there is not a mahogany in the Midlands that would droop its damask over our heretical legs thereafter; so let me not be so boldly craven as to write it. This absence of fences is *not* an *advantage*; nay, ofttimes we sorely long for blackthorn and ash-rail. After dinner, we sometimes think we could yet meet the combination without flinching, and take our chance at an oxer as in our hottest moments of youth and temerity.

But now we have nothing to stop us but a broken-banked brook in the bottom, which, however, swallows up all but the turban of "Dick Turpin," a joyous native princeling who accompanies the young Maharajah of Mysore. The Rajah is most regular at the sport, and Dick and Georgey are the most determined of his followers, ready to act as extra whips as occasion offers, and always on the look-out to race their ponies round a straying hound. Dick's steed has just now got a trifle the better of him, and submersion is the consequence; his zeal being apparently as much wetted as anything else in the process. Now we struggle up the rising ground in front, the van composed of some three or four hard-riding coffee planters—men who will gallop best pace over rocks or holes, and who ever "stick by the ship" till hounds return to kennel—by half-a-dozen soldiers who have been well entered to the game at home, and by (we beg their pardons) some three or four ladies who fly along till they and their steeds are ready to drop. For let me tell you that to nurse a horse up hill here, and hustle him down, require muscle and sinew such as our wives and daughters need scarcely possess—at least so long as our national prejudices do not call upon them to do the rougher handiwork

of life, or to defend themselves and their rights in matrimonial combat.

Hounds are heading straight upwards for the thick sholah, that clothes many an acre of the highest hillside. Jack made a sore mistake in not struggling on for it, for he has the best of the game just now, and is well out of view of the leading hound. But his evil genius has turned him from it. The pack wheel off to the left; so do we most gladly (for we are dropping slowly, surely behind), and, with hounds sparkling gaily and noisily above, we kick along at our utmost round the circular hill. The springy turf helps us on, and there is little effort beyond a smooth swift gallop now. We are just near enough to see which hounds are racing to the head, and to cheer the laggards to their leaders. Of a sudden they swoop towards us like a flock of pigeons, and we just reach them as they pass. For two or three miles in front the grassy slope stretches gradually downwards; and yet, though we have as good a pair of shoulders under us as Australia can produce, hounds are beating us every yard. As they reach the dip their game is to be seen not more than fifty yards in front of them—tongue out and brush down. His strong propelling muscles are no good to him now. In two hundred yards more they are on his back, and the fierce rumbling of a kill (you know the welcome sound, reader, if my English is inadequate to express it) reaches us as we struggle and spur to the spot. A fine dog jackal, or “plenty big man jackal,” as Mr. Veerasawmy terms him when five minutes later he arrives, grinning and glistening, to perform the last attentions to the dead. Jack has to be sliced in two or three directions (without which the pack will scarcely tear through his thick offensive skin); then we gather up what breath we have left for a few final screams, and soon all that remains of our stout quarry is the brush at a lady’s bridle, the head at Veerasawmy’s saddle, and a hind leg upon which old Clinker is still exercising his massive jaws.

A fortnight ago three of the big dog hounds from Quorndon (Dalesman, Chaunter, and Auditor) tore a *porcupine* to pieces.

Hounds had followed, as we thought, a jackal to ground in a natural drain, the two openings some fifteen yards apart. Veerasawmy made an opening, rescued the hounds, and pushed a long bamboo up the drain. First whip stood at the other end, when right at him flew a huge porcupine, buzzing open his quills as a peacock does his tail, scored both his tops deep with his sharp spears, then dashed straight at Chaunter, driving a quill three inches home. In frantic anxiety we yelled and trumpeted to call hounds in an opposite direction ; but Dalesman, Auditor, and the startled Chaunter were on him in a moment, and in another he was in pieces, though the mouth of the first-named was bristling with the quills, and Auditor was impaled through the leg, to be lame till date. Last year a hound was killed, and others maimed, in a similar encounter.



THE SOUTHERN MIDLANDS.

SEASON 1885—86.

FAWSLEY, A FIRST, AND NOTABLE, EXPERIENCE.

FAWSLEY, of whose manor and characteristics I have written elsewhere.—A mile consists usually of three bullock pastures and three double hedgerows. Of the latter, one may offer pretty practice—pop in and pop out, over low stake-and-bound and ditch. No horse could well do wrong with it, and each of us might fairly imagine, as we left it behind, that at last we were riding something “quite out of the common.” But the next two, like a river to swim, may be comparatively easy to get into, but puzzling indeed to get out of. The process of imprisonment midway is not altogether a term of happiness. It may mean a thorn in your eye, a hat off, a stirrup lost, your horse veering hard a-starboard and steering at full speed up mid-stream, or all these pleasing contretemps happening together. Then we wish ourselves at home, or at least, that we had not been so ambitious. “Take a lead and keep it,” is a text upon which the right sermon has never to my knowledge been built. The only fit and proper expounding should be—Follow a safe man, but only so close at his heels as will ensure three things—(1) That he shall have no excuse for turning round and shouting savagely, “Room, Sir, room, if you please!” (2) If he be too gentle to protest on his own behalf, that his widow should have no claim upon you if he falls and you alight on his ribs. (3) That you have time to turn aside and choose another safe man, if the first one jumps a too big or too hazardous place. In other words, the text should read, “Take a safe pilot, and follow him as long as your calculations as to personal peril

will allow! Never seek danger till you have somebody else's word for it that it does not exist" (this latter part of the maxim more especially intended for Irish use). And, as for a double fence in Northamptonshire, you may make it a useful maxim, "Not to plunge in at the front door until you have seen someone else make his way out at the back."

The vein of sport struck by each and every pack in the Midlands during the ten days preceding Christmas was again hit by the Grafton on Monday, December 21st. The same dark fog in every sense wrapped the day in gloom to the greater portion of a large and excellent field. Fortune's favours vary wildly and inscrutably; and the dog who in fox-hunting snatches one lucky day has assuredly either drawn his blanks very lately or they are ready for him in the immediate future. In each recent misty day of high-class sport there have been a certain number who could congratulate themselves that they were in luck, but a far larger number who were altogether out of it. The morrow would shuffle them round again, and the very men who for sheer vexation scarcely looked at their dinner one evening, returned home almost in rhapsodies the next. Overnight they had moaned out a sulky resolve to "sell every horse in the stable," go abroad, perhaps even take to fishing. Tonight the game would be "the only thing worth living for"—"just one more glass, my dear fellow, to Fox-hunting." "By Jove, but my new grey is a *real clinker*! You'd like a mount on him one of these days, eh?" And so, no doubt, you would; but unless you are sharp enough to book date and occasion at once, you are not very likely to find yourself astride that same grey. *In vino veritas* happens to be a motto that has little application to such promises as a mount on the best horse in the stable. *In vino* is a very liberal fellow, with no thought but extending to the friend of his heart the feeling of intense satisfaction in which he himself is revelling; but *veritas* is a colder-blooded individual who walks in next morning with a strong thirst upon him, and possibly with the slightest suspicion of a headache. No benevolence is for the moment so profound as

that of the recipient of recent blessings. Do you remember Gerard Ainslie (was it not?), who, a gentleman born and nourished in luxury, had by stress of fortune for some time been forced to do his own cooking and clothes-mending at the gold diggings, and who suddenly, by the death of a lamented aunt, found himself in a position of positive affluence? He felt so generous, "he felt so *good*." A chapter on his state of mind would not have conveyed so much as that one little sentence thus expressed by one of our best modern judges of men and women.

But this is all very much by the way. I'll give you one of my usual mounts on Pegasus with pleasure, and I'll borrow for you a pair of spectacles that shall help you peer into the foggy darkness of Monday. Take the old horse on trust, that's all—give him credit for such wind and condition as you want, turn his head loose if you will, but don't call him to account if he fails to keep it all the while exactly straight—for Pegasus affects not to compete with an ordnance map, nor will he "assume a virtue if he hath it not." "No, sirree, cooking is a thing as I despise," said the only unemployed man of a Western hunting-party, when asked to turn his attention to preparing the midday meal. Incivility he held to be no sin. Admitted ignorance is gross crime in that country of universal self-sufficiency. And, unlike most of his fellows, he had never learned to cook. So, though no actual idler, he preferred independence or even rudeness, to such a shameful confession as inability. Pegasus, on the same lines, is loth to admit that his geography lesson is not yet thoroughly learned. How should it be, when on at least three occasions out of four in the late great series of runs, both the country and much of the day's doings have been shrouded in almost impenetrable mist. In a fog the Grafton called together, at Preston Capes, the best and biggest field it has been my fortune to see in the Southern Midlands; in a fog they drew the two woods immediately below the place of meeting, and in a fog they followed a stale line for half a mile up to Fawsley House. Almost in darkness they moved on a

little way to try some outlying plantations; and, when the bitches all but jumped upon a fox springing up in their midst, they disappeared from sight together the very moment they left the narrow belt of trees among which they found him. A sorry handgate was a poor outlet, under such conditions and for such a field; but the quickest kept a grip on the hounds, and in feverish hurry the rest followed one another, clinging to the hope that those in front had, at least, something tangible to guide them. One or two horsemen must have been moving up the outer side of the thin spinney; for the next gate was on the swing, and full thirty people were immediately afterwards flying a stake-and-bound almost in line.

A few hundred yards further, and they were upon a breast-work that spread them right and left, as a breakwater checks a surging billow. A regular Fawsley Double stopped the way; and its two tall hedges loomed black and forbidding through the enveloping mist. Mr. Peel alone was equal to coping readily with the difficulty. Leaping on to the bank, at the weakest point he could find, he turned his well-trained horse up the thorny lane, till, reaching a spot at which the second hedge could be bored, he handled him with an adroitness quite marvellous in one who has but a single arm. Even to him only a fleeting and doubtful glimpse of a tail hound could have been his guide across the two next great pastures. The pack had started actually *with* their fox, and were still straining at his very brush—the few hounds who happened at first to be behind their comrades unable to make up a yard of ground—thus serving as the only beacon to the few horsemen in near pursuit. A second great double, a second despairing glance up and down, a moment's hesitation, another plunge forward into the darkness, and Smith (first whip and acting huntsman) now led a still slenderer number across the great grassfields, in rapid but indistinct pursuit. The fences hereabouts are strong—*too strong* when mist is hiding the gates and hounds fly as now. They bind the big branches so deftly and stoutly; they dig the ditches so wide and deep; and they often leave the late-cut thorns to

form a second parapet on the ditch side. But if the lingering nightmare of that foggy ride has any vestige of truth in its dim outline, still before my eyes, the leaders dwelt not in their frenzied career, but cleared, or crashed through, two or three of these at almost half-mile intervals. A roadside plantation came next, and the hedgecutter was still at work strewing his thorns alongside his wall of binders, as hounds dived into and through the little wood. "Up to the top-end, and you'll catch 'em at the bridle-gate!" sung out the knight of the bill-hook. But either deaf to the advice, or in despair at the rapidity with which the pack were again vanishing, the recipient of the caution chanced thorns and new cut hedge in his headlong gallop—entering the wood with a thud and a crash that should have sounded as a useful fog-signal to those behind. Meanwhile the two whips and Mrs. Bunbury (who alone of the field saw the whole of this curious run) had hit the bridle-gate, and followed by Mrs. Jones and Captain Riddell, shortly reached

the wood of Mantel's Heath—after as quick and disastrous a twenty minutes as hounds ever ran. The famous Belvoir bitches, I swear it, never travelled faster.

Tom Smith and Mrs. Bunbury plunged into the wood, while the others galloped round its edge. Hounds were through the covert at once, bore quickly to the right into the grassy vale, running nearly as fast as ever—while the whip and the lady alone accompanied them. Gates and gaps made the line easy for another rapid quarter of an hour; then a small detachment, headed by Mr. Goodman the farmer (always an excellent rider to hounds, but now only on a rough cob), with Major Waterhouse, Captain Fawcett, and one other gentleman from the Banbury district, struck in; and the chase went back till Preston Wood was nearly reached. Some carts in a road apparently turned the fox from that covert, for again he swung to the right, and, with two couple and a half of hounds hard on his line, crossed his former track (as was evidenced by handgates easily recognized even in the dim light as lately passed), pointing for Everdon. Smith soon became aware that some of his hounds were forward, and hunting these up as quickly as he could through and beyond Everdon Stubbs, came up to them at length somewhere near the village of Everdon. A cluster of boys, for once comparable to cherubs from the clouds, suddenly opened tongue with “tally-ho,” averring that *the* fox had crossed the Everdon Brook a quarter of an hour since. For men painfully alive to the fact that their horses were all more or less blown, it was quite pardonable to conclude that the information merely covered a ruse for procuring the rustics some little fun at the brook—till hounds took up the line, and the water-jump became inevitable. It was not very big—most fortunately grass to grass, and the banks level—and one and all of the five riders got over by persistent degrees, repeating the same feat half-a-mile farther on, where the brook had made a loop in its course. Now the chase held on towards Dodford, and across the Daventry turnpike. By this time (quite an hour and a half from the find) horses were all distinctly and emphatically protesting “Enough.” The scramble up the bank on to the road was, for instance, a sight almost pitiable. A low, thorny gap alone made the fence; but horse after horse stopped helplessly, with head stretched

through and feet out-planted. Beyond Dodford Holt Edward (the second whip) came up, with about a dozen horsemen and a few couple of hounds from Mantel's Heath. Information as to this long-travelling fox was again forthcoming, but with the extraordinary breadth of discrepancy that attaches itself to this more than to any known subject. "Not long," of course; but the difference between "Well, may be twenty minutes," and "I don't know as he's got across that there next field," was so wide that only an inquirer long intimate with the newly-enfranchised Northamptonshire labourer could possibly believe that the two answers so divergent were intended to convey one and the same fact.

The huntsman, *pro tem.*, however, not only refused to be daunted by the first reply, but with a thrill of hope accepted the second, jammed spurs into his jaded mare, viewed his beaten fox crawling up the next hedgerow, and three minutes later had the delight of taking him away from hounds. *One hour and fifty-five minutes*, they made it—and never was a fox better earned or more deservedly handled. Poor Beers, though! was he not more to be pitied on his bed of pain (with a broken leg) at that moment than even the scores of good sportsmen still wandering sadly over the fog-laden country? An hour's search for the second horses proving of no avail, hounds were ordered home, and the day ended. But that draggled little brush in Mrs. Bunbury's possession should be held a proud trophy through many a year to come—carrying memory back to a triumphant Merry Christmastide, 1885.

That hounds were in full cry next day I happen to know through the fact of my horses meeting them on the road, much to the tribulation of the man in charge, who appears to have seen, thanks to a watering bridle and "the gaffer's best 'oss," a good deal more of the chase than he desired. Of its incidents I could not learn much, as his narration was confined purely to his own unwilling adventures and to the perils encountered by

my treasured stead. On the latter point it is needless to say I was full of sympathy as he could possibly desire—though on what grounds he should have expected me to be responsive to reiterated allusions to his “wife and four children” I am at a loss to conceive. He brought these in with an almost entreating pathos when he came to the episode of his shivering a high white gate into match boxes. But I ask you, reader, was it more than human nature that my thoughts altogether refused to quit my favourite and his four legs, or that I should then and there have broken off his tearful story, to rush into the stable and examine my belongings after their recent danger? Ah me! it is not through the terrible oxers and rasps of penmanship that we and our horses come to grief. Our vicissitudes of horsemanship occur often enough, and seriously enough, but are seldom due to over-valour or anything like culpable rashness. If we hurt ourselves, it is over a gap, or, maybe, only a rabbit-hole. If *THE* horse of our life dies in the middle of a season, it is because lockjaw has followed the prick of a thorn or the misdirection of a shoe-nail, or because he missed his footing at a two-foot ditch. You and I have—perhaps more than once—grinned in pain over a fractured limb, the while our daily comrades were riding gaily and safely in the full swing of sport. But was it ever because we had made a bolder venture than they, or because we had, on that unfortunate day, tried our mount too high?

How often we hear, in reference to a new purchase, “I dare not ride him at timber because he has never been taught it, or at water because I don’t know that he will face it.” When such doubts and fears present themselves, depend upon it there is something wrong; it may be in the stable, it may be in the cellar, or it may be even in the baccy-box; but, believe me, the screw that is loose is far less likely to be found in the system of the quadruped than in that of the biped. I remember (no matter when or where) a very excellent rough-rider, in the employ of a worthy dealer—himself a man of iron nerve, ready at any moment and for any trial to displace the show-

man and occupy the saddle himself. "Bitters" (the subordinate) had for years been accustomed to mount whatever brute was forthcoming at his master's signal, with wonderful adroitness to make-believe he was exhibiting a pet lamb, and, without hesitation, to cram the said lamb at any dangerous leap that might offer itself to the fancy of either seller or buyer. But, as years went on, it became noticeable that Bitters's erst ruddy countenance was gradually losing much of its fresh and wholesome colouring. By slow, but sure, degrees, the bright complexion became bleached and pallid; while the once keen, sparkling eye assumed an unbecoming fishiness. Bitters, in fact, was beginning his day too early in the morning, and lengthening it too far into the night. And, with this unpleasant change of countenance came a still sadder alteration of temperament and soul. Bitters no longer jumped eagerly to the saddle the moment occasion offered for trying conclusions with a rogue worthy of his steel; still less did he display alacrity in forcing a half-taught colt to acquit himself as became a finished hunter, no matter what the suggested test might be. In other words, for instance, a greasy stile had no longer the same enticing charms for Bitters, nor was he now wont to offer of his own free will a tall, strong gate as a mere after-breakfast relish to a green four-year-old. He rode what he was obliged, and hitherto he had jumped where he was ordered. But suspicion had long ago entered the unwilling breast of his fond employer, and one day matters came to a crisis. "Take him across the drop-fence, Bitters, and bring him back over the timber in the corner" (the timber in question consisting of four stout new rails, and the young horse's shoulders being withal of the most questionable type). Bitters (without doubt not such a fool as he looked) affected to hear only the first part of the directions; took the drop-fence leisurely, and galloped back over an easy stake-and-bound. "Put him over the post-and-rails," repeated the master, with some acerbity. But still Bitters lingered, and assumed that most convenient of all protectors, a stubborn deafness. Once more did his com

manding officer shout the order, adding, somewhat sullenly, "Why, confound the fellow, I believe he's *afraid*." "Even a worm will turn," we are told. But Bitters was up in arms at once. The leaden hue which had stolen over his wan face at the first suggestion of the timber flushed suddenly to an alcoholic purple; and forgetting his deafness, he flung the insinuation from him with hot indignation. "No," he retorted, "I *ain't afraid*, and that's all about it. But I've larned to know when the beggars are going to fall."

A BURSTING FALL.

"A BURSTING fall," is a term with which most of us have acquired familiarity, as a fashion of speech as well as a too possible incident in our several careers. But seldom have I seen it more sharply illustrated than in the case of a bold brown

hunter to-day, who met the turf with such concussion as to send saddle, rider and all, a full furrow's width across the field. He then, of course, proceeded to take his place at the head of

the Hunt, while his hapless owner (barred by the hat of nineteenth-century custom from carrying the saddle in its only proper position, viz. on his head) had to trip it o'er the greensward with the pigskin and its shivered girths held in front of him like a big drum. The question in my wandering mind at once arose as to whether he, poor man, was worse off under the circumstances than another fellow sportsman whose misfortune I witnessed (and vainly endeavoured to assist) with the Whaddon Chase some weeks ago. In this latter case the dismounted horseman carried the bridle! The steed thereupon had everything his own way—not excepting other people's turn at the gaps (a distinction we all covet but attempt only to seize according to our bringings-up). Which for choice? There can be little doubt as to the answer, though a saddle may weigh fourteen pounds, and a double bridle can claim but two in the scales. The barebacked horse may be caught in a single field; the bare-headed one may gallop to Jericho, Coventry, or to the public nearest his own stable—as fancy, knowledge of country, or daily habit may suggest. In this case the loss of saddle was fortunately at the cost of neither sport nor other inconvenience beyond a short double in heavy-marching-order. But that to be unexpectedly flung saddle-and-all is no pleasing joke I happen to be able to testify most strongly. Last week's two frosty days having forced me into the well-brushed sleekness of a London hat, I went, after the manner of a fox-hunter who is very busy indeed in town, to indulge in a dawdle at my saddler's. His wooden horse carried his new patent saddle to perfection; but by some chance a similar saddle was immediately afterwards put “on the wrong horse,” to wit on a saddler's stool. In happy and well-hatted ignorance I mounted briskly—making certain that in this instance at least the new mount was surely entitled to the description of “sound and quiet to ride.” But (alas for dignity, safety, and self-command), the saddle pommel alone was supported, the seat and its occupant in a moment occupied inverse positions, the saddler picked up the pieces (among others a crumpled hat), and our

interview came abruptly to an end. (Think I shall ride at a fair post and rails now, and judge if a fall over timber can hurt half as much.)

BICESTERSHIRE.

A MOST pleasing feature in the Southern Midlands is to be found in the grassy sides attached to every road ; and that, even after the recent deluges, allows of a safe, clear gallop to covert, or of a long pipe-opener on an off-day. The number and direction of these roads are amplified to a degree truly extraordinary ; but the way-wardens, of Northamptonshire at all events, decorate all crossings and turnings lavishly with signposts that will almost tell you the way to Paradise, or even the number of miles you must travel to get there. That these are sufficient guides for ordinary purposes I can gratefully testify ; but if the kindly officials to whom I refer will forgive me, I will mention (in all good faith) an instance in which even their forethought failed signally to carry out their public-spirited intentions. On a certain day, and at a certain hour, a certain hunt, as written below, turned abruptly in its cross-country track to regain a covert just left ; and as is usual in such sudden counter-marches, everybody in the field encountered everybody else—rider to rider—save one, who was footing it hard to the old familiar cry, “Hi, catch,” &c. Everybody would only too *gladly* have done so, but where was the etcetera ? This was evidently the question the well-breeched and unwilling pedestrian asked himself, for he redoubled his gait till breathlessly he reached the signpost at the four cross roads. Banbury so many miles, Daventry so many less, and Lutterworth so many more ! But where, oh where ? “Three to one on the field,” said the signpost. “Which way has he gone ?” cried his comrades. But to neither could he frame a word of reply ; for not even the glimmer of a short-cropped tail was to be seen in the distance. In bitterness of soul he cast his stirrups on the ground (he had ’em both, for safety-stirrups possess ever this

advantage, that you may pick them up at leisure after a fall) ; in anger he realised the culpable shortcomings of the road surveyors and their directories ; in spirit he invoked Triviator, the deity of the cross roads ; and, in good humour, he will forgive my recalling an incident that bade me pick up my pen at bedtime lest I lie awake to laugh.

A tale I have to tell of the Bicester (Sat., Dec. 4th)—if I can but tell it, hampered as I am by knowing little of the country and not a moiety of its field by sight or name. Thenford was the meet, and the source of a run that could boast of an eight mile point and a kill in the open, and that lasted for an hour and fifty minutes. The time conveys no idea of the pace, for the early part of the chase was anything but straight. Hounds went over a great amount of ground, and, freshening to their work as the run went on and as their fox went straighter, they drove him to death in the handsomest fashion.

The sport began from the very meet, was carried on into the Grafton country, and there continued till the fox was killed and hounds went home. At least three foxes were roused from the willow bed outside Mr. Grazebrook's garden gates ; one soon fell a victim to the popular enthusiasm, but a brace contrived to escape the medley. Hounds swallowed their luncheon speedily, and then took up the line which was to lead to an afternoon meal. But they were not as yet on terms good enough to allow of pace, and the huntsman's assistance came in more than once before they had worked their way round a pretty grass valley to Thenford Gorse, and forward into Grafton territory.

From Silverstone Village came the fastest and merriest part of the gallop. Stovin held his pack over a passing difficulty, and when again they touched the scent they went into it with a fervour they had scarcely felt before. By a plantation-side, they carried a determined head over stubbles and arable for a mile or so, and fairly flew across the grassy acres beyond. Mr. Harrison showed the ready way into a deep lane in their track, and Mr. Campbell bored a hole out, while Colonel Molyneux, Mr. B. Grosvenor, and Lord Suffield went quickly in

and out on the right. Two loose horses within a quarter of a mile gave token that the pace was telling. "Hang his bridle over the gatepost, sir, and push along; or you'll never see hounds again to-day!" Plough once more! Wheat that can never pay, and stubble that must have cost three pounds an acre, dead loss! Alas, for agriculture! Well, each Radical cow will demand most of her three acres in grass, will she not? But, heavens, how close the fences will come then! They are wide apart just now—thirty or forty acres to each field—the speckled pack glancing in front, half-a-dozen riders struggling across the plough in their wake, and several sensible men skying off to the left to gain a parallel line of grass, even at the cost of a stout flight of rails and its varied consequences. Into another lane, with the same deep and hairy ditch beside it, that has already distinguished so many fences and extinguished no few followers. Another plough team, working by the wayside. "He's gone for the corner!" Yes, but which corner? And till hounds can glean the teamster's meaning, or the huntsman can carry them in the direction gradually intimated, a half minute is lost that means a quarter of an hour's reprieve to their gallant fox. In his blown and distressed condition he has turned away from the first wood now encountered (Crown Lands, I believe), clung to the neat open rides of the second, Bucknalls, and struggled out beyond for a final effort homewards. Bearing back from the village of Abthorpe, he is plainly to be viewed in front, toiling over the grass fields by the railway. Now, they must have him, and they've earned him. If you have any blood in your body, it must spring in your veins at this moment—the most spirit-stirring in fox-hunting. Don't your hackles go up like the bristles of the straining bitches now running for blood—else why that hot-and-cold feeling down the backbone as you drive the Latchfords once home into your tired beast, and your thoughts flash back to old Jorrocks in his maddest, wildest happiness? "'Ere's the fox!" cries a boy in the ballast hole by the railway bank, while out bounces a banging old hare, and close in her tracks,

with no hungry look at her, but with a wistful, pitiful glance over his shoulder at the nearing turmoil in pursuit, comes Reynard, red and bright, and still almost clean, but, oh, so leg-weary and exhausted! No spark of pity, though, can we spare him now. The bitches are trooping over the bank, not fifty yards behind him, but never a glimpse do they catch, as he crawls from view through a dark, thick hedgerow. But in the very next field they are coursing by sight. Half-a-dozen hats are crushed and torn in following through a low bullock hole in the thorny screen, and soon there is the old happy group—men happier, yet more gently happy, than after any other success in life—and there is the old delightful scene of steaming, riderless horses, and on the green turf a stark furry form the centre-mark for forty fierce, baying throats.

The sole drawback to this most sporting run was the absence of the Master, Lord Chesham, through a luckless fall. As to who was at the kill, it is impossible that I should attempt to enumerate by name. But besides those above mentioned, there were here, and prominent in the run, at least Messrs. G. Drake, Green, Grazebrook, Peareth, Kenyon, Brown, G. and B. Leigh, Bourke, Lord Bentinck, and Lord Capel, while Mrs. Brown carried away the brush in confirmation of honours she had fairly earned.

JACKAL HUNTING ON THE NEILGHERRIES, 1877.

THE OOTACAMUND HOUNDS.

YOU are already aware that the Ootacamund hounds have their home and their sport on the grass-covered summits of the Blue Mountains. From other sources most people know that Ootacamund is the rendezvous of the Anglo-Indians of the south—fleeing *en masse*, as much as may be, from the purgatory of the hot weather of the plains. This year the famine held the Governor, his Council, and all minor satellites fast bound to their duty of charity and relief in the arid districts below. In a few cases helpmates and offspring remained to support the good men in their trial, and to share their privation. But such is not altogether the way in India; and so, though there was wanting, perhaps, whatever little element of grave decorum might previously have held place in the society of the hills, yet Ooty, apparently, suffered no lack of life or energy in consequence. Its routine of gaiety was never more unceasing; its whirligig of excitement was never pushed round more merrily; gossip never flew so blithely, nor reputation so lightly; tongues were no less glib; ears were no less open. Maidens were no more timid, matrons no less frisky, though fathers and husbands were not there to guard them, and the social wolf of India (who ever loves and never weds) beset their path at every turn. Fearlessly and happily, as heretofore, they gambolled on unceasingly. The rink had added a new attraction, and thither resorted daily the lambs who had pretty ankles, while the lambs-who-had-not disported themselves on the Badminton courts hard by—lambs that were no longer

lambs, but would fain be thought so, joining the one party or the other, as fancy or figure dictated. The wicked ones in sheepskin, too, mixed freely in either throng, shared their pursuits, or hovered outside on the watch for a straggler, straying maybe not unwillingly nor unconsciously. Badminton is, doubtless, an exhilarating if not an ennobling game, but methinks, if I had a mind to be young again, I would rather seek my amusement with yon grey-clad skater than with his prototype wielding a Badminton bat. The former is swinging round the glassy arena hand-in-hand with a supple nymph, the sparkle in whose eye and the rose on whose cheek can surely not *all* be due to the exercise; the latter has to stand rooted silently to his section of the court, posed elegantly with legs wide apart, mouth and eyes wide open, every nerve intent on returning a ball of Berlin wool over a net—no whispered word, no gentle pressure of hand for him. He is but an unit of the dozen thus solemnly attitudinising; his loved one is placed, may be, yards behind him, and the only winged words that reach him are her chidings as he fails in his stroke; and yet Young England, after a brief transportation, *does* play Badminton—more, I am inclined to think, as a means than an amusement. That a temporary degeneracy may oftentimes be begotten of circumstance, we have the case of Hercules and Omphale of old to prove; while for more modern instance have we never seen a staunch warrior holding a skein of worsted for fair hands to wind, nor deemed his occupation one whit less worthy of his manhood than is Badminton?

But if the above gay throng suffered no depression from the absence of heavy fathers and doting husbands, the Ootacamund Hunt Fund did; for the fair beings by no means represented in full degree the family purse, while as for their esquires, 'twas pitiable, 'twas eminently sad, to see how complacently they doffed the lion skin, laid down the club (I refer not by any means to Ooty's corner-stone of tittle tattle—the men's brush-and-comb association of the Neilgherries), and took up the lyre. In other words, how they gave up hunting and took to

Badminton, forswore their early instincts, and buttoned up their pockets. Alas for our country!

And so at the commencement of the season of 1877—the hunting season, be it remembered, being cotemporary, perforce, with the period of the year during which Ootacamund is a fashionable resort—there was a fine pack of hounds in kennel; but at so low an ebb were the funds of the Hunt that the adjective *fine* was gradually assuming a distinct and secondary meaning, and sale or starvation were only just warded off by the self-sacrificing efforts of Mr. Schmidt, the keenest and most thorough of honorary secretaries.

Thirty-one couple; and you might almost have taught a child his alphabet from the varied brands on their ribs. From the Atherstone to Lord Yarborough's, every initial was represented that ever figured on a list of hunting appointments; and there is little reason to doubt that the causes which had procured the banishment of the various members were well-nigh as numerous, embracing every sin of omission and commission to which hound flesh is heir. Far be it from me that any expression of mine should appear as a wish to foul the nest which received me in April 1877. But such was the nest—a bed of roses, possibly, for an enthusiast, but of no thornless roses most assuredly; and such was the material with which it was considered desirable that the field should be taken at once, and in full publicity. Cubhunting or schooling of any kind was held as totally inadmissible, on the plea that the sinews of war must be the most immediate consideration, and that the ever-shifting society of Ootacamund could only be called upon in earnest when matters were fairly started. The reasoning was plausible enough, no doubt, and the argument possibly sound; but this scarcely sufficed to make the situation relishing, even when it was added that there were plenty of jackals on the hills, and that the hounds were apparently in perfect health. So they were undoubtedly—in the most *boisterous* of health—short commons notwithstanding. For very fear, the gates of the kennel yard had been kept closed on

them for the month they had already spent on the Neilgherries. Half the pack, it is true, were tried and trusty servants, the chosen remainder from the previous year; and their well-deserved rest after the heat of Madras and Bangalore might possibly not have elated them altogether beyond bounds. Another three couple had recently arrived from Leicestershire, and it was hoped that not even a sea voyage would have entirely eradicated the discipline inculcated at Quorndon. But of the rest no language can give any just idea of this band of wild irrepressibles, of the atrocities they committed, or of the anxiety, and oftentimes shame, that they caused before any glimmering of the idea that they were to consider themselves "component parts of one harmonious whole" could be made to dawn upon them.

"I am the Lord Cardwell, sir," was the closing sentence of a hot argument held in a railway carriage some five years ago. It was addressed by an elderly gentleman to a cavalry captain of strong views and a good parade voice. The two were travelling casually together; the latter entertained a decided opinion on the new military system, and was ever ready to hold forth loudly, and perhaps rightly, on the subject of discontented officers and pigmy recruits. His last vehement outburst, ending, "Cardwell's the man who did it all, and blessed if they haven't gone and made the beggar a peer!" extracted from his opponent an admission that might more discreetly have been made earlier in the encounter.

I have received no peerage for my administration of affairs, nor, as a consequent counter-punishment, yet come unawares across the plain speaker who should hold up the glass in which each error was reflected and each shortcoming shown with unsparing exactitude. But, to guard against either contingency, I may here proffer the admission that it was I, the writer, who had to bear the chief burden of the task of organisation in the Ooty kennels. No apology is wanted for the declaration; for, while to the bulk of my readers it will merely serve as a guarantee of facts, the individuality of the scribe being a matter

of indifference to them, to local readers it will, I trust, only open to their friendly recognition what a *nom de plume* would not have availed to hide.

No undertaking in India is ever carried on except at the hands of a committee, who meet with great solemnity and cumbersomeness, and record and treasure very carefully all the profound utterances and dignified resolutions given birth to at these meetings—usually leaving to their honorary secretary all the trouble and responsibility connected with ways and means, which one would imagine to be the chief function for which they were called into existence. So of course there was an Ootacamund Hunt Committee. But the two working representatives—and the two men to whom the Ooty Hunt really owes its life and being—were Major Robert Devonshire and Mr. Schmidt. The former knows a good deal more about the business than is given to most amateurs, having been brought up under the guidance and tutoring of Squire Trelawny, and inheriting from him the keenness of a Scotch terrier. He would long ago, and with thorough fittedness, have assumed the joint offices of Master and huntsman himself, had not the Forest Department, in whose pay his lot is cast, considered that the care of their young plantations demands a man with a less engrossing source of recreation than the charge of a pack of hounds. So now he contents himself with remaining the practical backbone of the Hunt; has locked up his red coat to please his employers, but still lends full and vigorous assistance in all matters pertaining to the flags or the field. Mr. Schmidt's knowledge of the chase has been the offspring of local experience; but, while each succeeding season has added something to the store, it has diminished in no degree his ingrafted love for the subject.

So one morning, early in April, there issued mounted from the kennels at break of day the huntsman, the two gentlemen above, with two "dog boys" on foot, the first-named accoutred with his horn, and the others with whips of office—all with a view to taking the newly-formed pack for exercise. But where

was Veerasawmy's well-known form and sable face, that for fourteen years had never been missed from kennel or covert side, whether during the summer at Ootacamund, or during the cool weather at Madras? For fourteen faithful years had he tended each pack—loving them as no nigger ever loved animals before—nursing them in sickness, and glorying in their doings. Let rice be at famine price, he took none of it from the troughs; let the work be never so hard, it was performed as soon as suggested; and these are two attributes that we have since searched for with patience, but searched for in vain. If stray hounds were to be fetched home, Veerasawmy knew by instinct where to find them. With him it was no "Very good, sar, I go bring," and a prompt exit—to the nearest bazaar for a drink and a sleep; but he would sound the "Co boy! co bo'oy!" that he had acquired, and the old tin trumpet with which he was entrusted, on every hillside, till sure enough he returned with the wanderers. He was an honest native, a truthful Madrassee, an anomaly in his land; and his death was a loss irreparable. Not a week before the date of which I write he had been carried off by heart disease. That I may not have to dwell further upon the misfortunes of the year, I may here add that during the ensuing three months the kennel cook was carried off by small pox, and fever either killed or laid low almost every other member of the Hunt establishment.

But to return to our morning's exercise. The inmates of the building had already begun to sniff liberty, and the noise within had become appalling, when at a signal the door was opened, and out they rushed, scrambling and tumbling over each other—those underneath yelling for their lives, and the puppies giving tongue as freely as if on a hot scent in covert. The cracking of whips in their faces hindered only the old stagers of the mob, the remainder dashing forward, heads up and sterns down, as delighted as schoolboys at their unexpected holiday. A nanny goat startled at the uproar sprang away before them, and naturally enough the puppies seized the chance presented, raised a hue and cry in her wake that must have roused all

sleeping Ooty, and pursued her pell-mell down the road. A check was brought about by Nanny manfully turning round upon her pursuers ; but reinforcements arriving (the contagion having now spread through the whole pack), she was forced again to betake herself to flight. As ill-luck would have it, a Mohammedan shopkeeper, of high caste and position, was taking down his shutters close by. In through the open door dashed Nanny, after her rushed the thirty couple of noisy fiends, upsetting the shopman on their way, and defiling his carcase with their unclean feet. The uproar in the shop became hideous, as the nanny goat stood at bay on a shelf, the counter swept of its wares, and the floor a chaos of every conceivable commodity that a store affords. The huntsman, almost as enraged at the conduct of his pets as the now foaming shopkeeper, stood some fifty yards away, blowing his horn with might and main, while his attendants plunged into the *mêlée*, and plied whipcord and rating with lavish freedom. The Baboo, regaining his feet, seized a double-barrelled gun ; but, fortunately, could not find his cartridges, or assuredly some crime, and possibly bloody reprisal, would have been committed. The old hounds soon tired of their disgraceful lark, and their younger *confrères* were quickly made to feel the situation too hot for them.

This was only the first act of a stirring morning's performance. But I need not dwell on how the young entry found further genial occupation in chivying a black retriever until he plunged under his sick master's bed ; nor how they ran the pug of a lady of high rank and position (this in India, too, where rank and precedence are words of awful significance) to ground in its mistress's pony carriage, frightening the owner almost to death, and starting her pony in their determined efforts to draw their prey. When at length they were brought back to kennel, master and whips were exhausted and despondent. But breakfast did much towards recruiting nature, and enabling them to continue the course of discipline. A great part of the remainder of the day was spent in impressing upon the subjects under

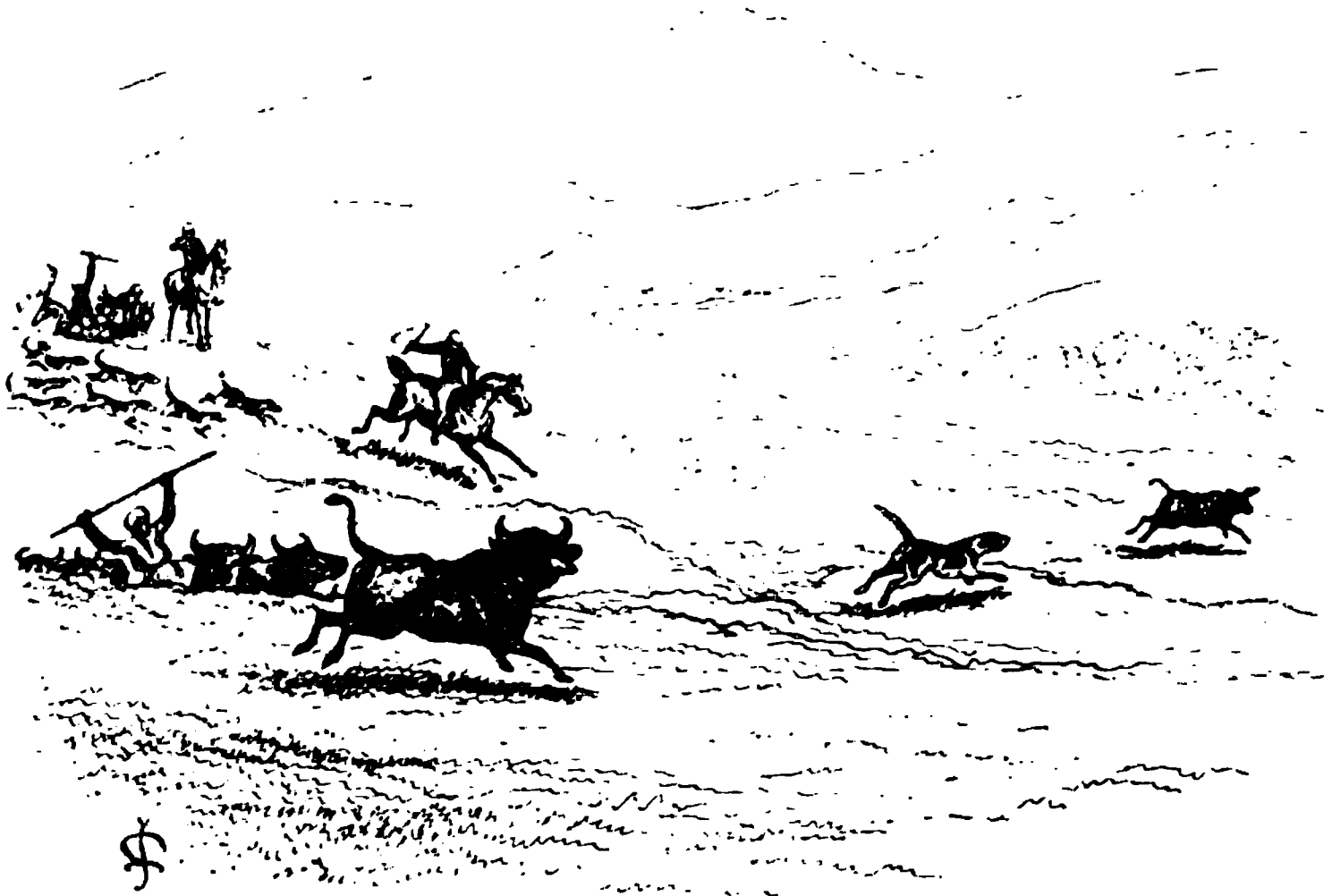
treatment that names had been given them in their youth, with the intent that they should come when they were called, and not before. The difficulty of inculcating this principle was by no means facilitated by the fact that several recent additions to the pack had arrived without register of baptism or other record whatever. The next day was very similarly employed, very similar advantage being taken by the leading miscreants of the opportunities offered by the morning's exercise. On the third day, virtue (the virtue of sublime resignation, and of trust in a merciful fate) had to be made of necessity, and the public gaze faced at the opening meet. Ye huntsmen of Merrie England, who from April to November can throw all your energies into the schooling of your ten to twenty couple of juveniles, whom it is proposed to incorporate with three times their number of steady veterans—tell me, what bribe would you accept to place yourself in such a situation as this? Put reputation on one side and think only of the personal misery of such a plight. Think of the shameful dread, of the agonised anticipation, of the excruciating attempts at appearing cheerful, placid, and confident, when all the time your mental condition would be, as Mr. Bumble put it, that of "sitting on broken bottles;" and say, would any price induce you to accept the position?

True, the field was scarcely of the class we hope to see on the 1st prox. (or thereabouts) at Kirby Gate, though from many points of resemblance it might possibly aspire to rank with that sent out by some of our sporting spas (other, *of course*, than Handley Cross). But, as we are all aware, knowledge of a subject is by no means a *sine quâ non* to criticism upon it; moreover, the backslidings and offences developed by the pack of the season '77, in their two first mornings' exercise had gone from mouth to mouth, and ear to ear—rapidity of transmission, strange to say, blunting in no degree the points of the story, nor even deducting from the variety and number of its incidents. Indeed, of such terrific significance were some of the tales abroad, that more than one timid fair one stayed at home,

rather than encounter a pack to whom rumour assigned all the fiercest qualities of Cuban bloodhounds. So the public were all agape to witness something novel and spicy for themselves ; nor were they doomed to be altogether disappointed, though every precaution had been taken by those most concerned to avert any catastrophe and invite success. Twelve couple of trusty hounds had been told off to represent the kennel on the occasion ; but in a hapless moment it was determined that a more orthodox and imposing appearance would be presented by some slight increase of numbers. Thus, against better conviction, and again swayed by the luckless necessity of currying the favour of subscribers present and problematical, two more couple were drawn to swell the parade. These consisted of two puppies, who, instead of taking part in the recent riots, had shown, by remaining timidly at horses' heels, that they required encouragement ; of a hound whose chief fault lay in the plebeian appearance of his unrounded ears, which it was hoped might pass unnoticed in the mob ; and of a recent importation named Statesman. The last was a hound recently imported, of fine appearance, and of a countenance so meek as almost to lead to the belief that butter could not melt in his mouth, nor had he been noticed as taking any very prominent part in the disturbances aforesaid.

The precautionary hour of 6 A.M. having also been fixed for the meet, prevented anything like a large assemblage. But why dwell on the sad history ? Ill-fortune prevented a find for the first hour of search, until Statesman espied a buffalo calf in the distance, and gave instant chase, being in his turn pursued by the cow with an agonised bellowing that brought on the whole of the herd to her assistance. Screams that might have been heard from end to end of the Belvoir Vale rose from the Toda herdsman, and, unable to resist the excitement any longer, the whole pack soon broke away into the valley, leaving their huntsman in a frame of mind in which tearing of the hair would have been no solace, and murder the only alleviation. He spoke not, neither did he once apply his horn to the

whitening lips that might be seen moving, as it were, with the incantations of a wizard. At last Bob Devonshire succeeded in



cutting the dastard form of Statesman well nigh in two with his heavy lash, and sent him slinking back to sterner and more formal punishment at the hands of Mr. Schmidt. The remainder soon found they had been enticed into a wild goose chase. Statesman was sent home to kennel, and condemned indefinitely to half rations and idleness. Matters were righted *pro tem.*, and a twenty minutes' scurry soon afterwards acted as some slight salve to wounded feelings.

But it would be hard indeed to pass judgment on the Ooty Pack on the basis of their misadventures at starting; and so I must ask my readers to allow six weeks of daily and incessant work to have passed, and come out with me on one or two of their best days.

By this time the puppies and new-comers had been drilled into very fair order, having been out at least twice a week, in company only of an odd couple or so of venerable sages, until one by one they could be depended upon not to disgrace themselves before the public, and were permitted to take their part

on advertised days. These were now alternately three and four per week—quite sufficient, you will say, to employ a pack of about thirty couples, but, believe me, not a bit more than sufficient to keep the ardour of such a “vagarious” establishment within bounds. In fact, severity administered in the shape of work was found to act far more beneficially than in the form of punishment—the more so as Bob Devonshire’s stud being very liberally employed by the department to which he was attached, his services could not always be depended upon, and Mr. Schmidt’s knowledge of the country did not always make such amends for want of pace in his hunters as would allow him to be at all times within hail. Indeed, the chief difficulty connected with arranging for more than two days in the week was in the impossibility of getting together a field of anything like reasonable size.

I was going to say they are all one-horse men in the Presidency of Madras. But that expression, I have been told, is nowadays occasionally used as a term of reproach (much as that of *Ensign* was considered and repelled accordingly by a friend of mine, to whom it been applied, and who added indignantly, “off parade”), and, moreover, as such might be seized upon in triumph by the intolerant men of Bengal; so I may qualify it by saying that, with few exceptions, they don’t keep any horses at all—solely for recreative, much less for hunting purposes. Whether this is due to the famine of the last two years, which, directly or indirectly, pinched everybody; to the facilities of the present day towards an early return to England, and the consequent desirability of saving a fund for the trip home; or to the extinction of other sport, such as pig-sticking, in Southern India, I am not in a position to decide. Or else, again, it may be that India is not as desirable a country of residence as the pensioners of old John Company depict it as having been in their day; and, consequently, all men whose means are sufficient to allow of their keeping a horse or two, or of permitting themselves any indulgence beyond bare existence and a never-ending succession of rank Trichinopoli cheroots, prefer to return as

soon as they can to the country of their birth. By these I do not of course mean the men of long standing and in possession of lucrative situations, who feed upon the cake and ale of the land, who receive more rupees per mensem than they can spend, even with the aid of dinner parties many and big, of the *mem-sahib's* frequent consignments of dresses from Paris, and of thirty ravenous servants on the premises. They are great potentates in the Presidency. But, alas! how many people will they find to do honour to their Collectorship or Commissioner-ship (or even to understand the meaning of the terms) when, with a liver that has increased in a steady ratio with the pension due to their service, they give up the East that for them at least was gorgeous, and attempt the disappointing process of assimilating in their old age their tastes and habits to those of a new and different world.

Accordingly, as I have observed above, very few men on the hills were in possession of horses purchased and maintained solely for the pure and peaceful pursuit of hunting. The military men had brought up their chargers, civilians the hacks that carried them about their districts, and the coffee planters what they termed their estate horses—though it is only fair to add that the coffee estates appeared to require more horses than were wanted for daily parade. Two chargers and their masters had been induced to take service with the hunt, and the latter rendered great and willing help to the cause. But neither a hussar's nor a gunner's war horse can be expected to turn hounds four days in a week, and that in a country where *six* practised and well-mounted whips would not be too many; the two old kennel horses were on their last legs (these last being by no means better than their first); and so it was often a matter of difficulty to get the "hunt servants," as well as the general public, turned out as often as desirable.

But I am losing time, and must abbreviate as I go if I would keep within bounds allotted.

A Friday morning, 7.30 A.M.—one covert already drawn blank (Porcupine Sholah, where many a hound has been pierced,

and more than one killed), and two miles of hillside already searched. A mongoose was then holloed by Mr. Phantom (one of our staunchest supporters) as he caught a glimpse of a brown form slinking over a brow; but the mistake was rectified by his wife before mischief was done (for the steadiest of hounds will go mad over a mongoose). Jack Phantom, I may here remark, was one of the most successful steeplechase riders in India, till matrimony gave him a lady who can ride up to hounds as hard as he can, since which, like many another man, he has had to renounce the flagged course. The man on the brown horse I may call Mr. Thomas: he is also a planter, and, in my humble opinion, the best man to hounds on the Neilgherries; while the horse he is bestriding is quite equal to the task of carrying him. To see the two in the wake of hounds, driving down the mountainous hillsides, or flying in unchecked career over ground bestrewn with loose rocks and hidden with ferns, is in itself terrific; and no run is ever too severe or too intricate to choke him off. Two other people there are I must introduce you to, as most intimately connected with Ooty's Hunt. They are Col. G. Clerk, of the Rifles, and Mrs. Clerk. They have learned their love of hunting in England, and are prominent among the minority who keep it thriving under an Eastern sun. They both possess the gift of living with hounds under all circumstances; and Mrs. Clerk has an unequalled talent for counting them out of covert. Mr. Ricardo, the first whip, is all there, you will observe. Mr. Butler, the second, is there too; but is reduced to a pony to-day.

So on past a village, with a view to some scrub-covered hills beyond. Old Dalesman has stopped with wavering stern across the path of the huntsman's horse. Now he gives a single anxious whimper; the old hounds crowd round him and work their noses as if to draw a scent from the ground by the main force of the inspiration; while the youngsters of the pack circle rapidly and excitedly round the busy group. Hecuba, eager to distinguish herself, is making a cast of her own a hundred yards ahead, Ricardo rides round her, and once more

there resounds the too familiar words "Hecuba, ba-ack!" If my death-bed be an uneasy one, I really think my spirit will cry out "Hecuba! Have a care!" and pass away muttering mournfully that one should ever have to rate a hound of one's own. Hecuba was a brilliant puppy, full of dash and drive and devilry; but I should like to have sent her to George Carter of the Fitzwilliam for three months' schooling.

More than one of the field has already kicked his horse nervously in the ribs; and when Hebe and Bondsman indorse the line it requires some persuasion to prevent them starting off at score—for they know how hounds can scatter their field when they run on the Neilgherries. A herd of bullocks obliterates the faint trail, but a rather lengthy forward cast reopens it again, Hecuba this time flinging into it before the others cross it. Now it freshens; now they can all tell eagerly of it, and now they hunt quickly down the hillside to a little brook below. Jack might have stopped here for a bath in his morning prowl; for in an instant hounds settle to it noisily, dash over the stream and up the next ascent. Ride after them now as hard as you like. There is not a man, woman, or horse that will gain a yard on them for the next twenty-five minutes. Phantom is close at them; and closest to him, as in duty bound, is Mrs. Phantom. Steady a bit, Phantom, you haven't got steeplechase condition under you to-day. Thomas takes a pull; and so does Mrs. Clerk. Gentle rising ground now, then a high level, and hounds three hundred yards to the good. Major Titbit loses his hat as he gallops along a bullock path, the only road through a narrow sholah; and, much to the indignation and chagrin of Mrs. Clerk, he insists on dismounting for it and completely barricading the way. You may make up some ground now if you have only the nerve of Mr. Thomas, and your horse has shoulders to allow of your sitting back and kicking him down the hill. There are countless loose stones in your path; horses never fall when galloping down the steepest and most stone-covered hills of the Neilgherries. But then there are no rabbit-holes there. Ugh!

The fertile Nunginade valley is the course, and as pretty a one as our country could afford. Turf stretches alongside its stream for several miles, and the pack are raging over it still a hundred and fifty yards ahead. Now we plunge in and out of a ford; now we cross again and fly it, Thomas alighting in a bog, but up again, a little dirtier, in a moment. The pace is awful; Mrs. Phantom and the grey are the only ones who look likely to last long. Three miles along the valley; then, as it curved, straight up the opposite rise. What fiends are these hill jackals! No fox that ever heard a view holloa could live in front of hounds like this. Forty minutes to some rocky crags, and he has beat us clean! Not a horse can wag; and for the last five minutes *our* pace has been but a crawl.

That was one run. Very few lines must suffice for another of a fortnight later, when the monsoon had broken, and cloudy weather admitted of a meet at the charming and familiar hour of eleven. A large field in consequence. Two jackals on foot at two o'clock, one of which sought his own destruction by getting to ground where hounds could reach him—a job which they accomplished with much satisfaction to themselves. Moving from the spot, a line was spoken to, not two hundred yards away. "It's the *old line*," was the scientific remark pronounced by more than one Nimrod of the Ooty Hunt; and when the direction followed was seen to be exactly the converse of the one taken half-an-hour before, their opinion was duly strengthened. Strange to say, the line was *not* an old one; twenty-five minutes' at racing speed ensued, while many of the philosophers remained wonderingly at the starting point. Met by some woodcutters, our jackal lay down, eventually sneaking back upon us and gaining time. We had nineteen couple out, and they hunted from one grassy slope to another till they wore him to death at the end of two hours and five minutes—every hound up, and old Fretful (who had previously done her six seasons with the Craven and Quorn, but who is younger than ever now) having puzzled out more than one subtle

twist. Wasn't this a dish dainty enough to set even before a king?

And so Englishmen make the best of a bad country; but to keep a pack of hounds going in India is often a work of no little difficulty, and not all pleasure.

GRASS COUNTRIES.

SEASON 1886—87.



SHOOTING COATS.

THE final musters of the cub-hunting months are often as representative—if scarcely as exaggerated—as those of mid-winter. And the multitude makes the multitude ride. I question if it is ever much harder upon hounds even when arrayed in all the panoply of adventure and pride. An item in a shooting jacket is apt to consider himself *incog.*, at least to a degree that allows a chance of his being set down as “only somebody’s man schooling a young one”—instead of being wrathfully particularised as that “thrusting chap who killed old Dorothy, and whose subscription wouldn’t pay for the rails he breaks in a week.” I have no individual instance before me—nor will I have in the future when seeming to adopt the villany of fault-finding—unless perchance I may have caught *myself* tripping or fooling, and can picture it under some *alias* for the entertainment of our little world. But, i’ faith, good company *does* dispel funk, as it scatters many another doleful malady of mind or nerve. We who hunt looking on—one eye on the hounds, another on the Master, and as many more as we’ve got on our comrades, that haply they may help us along or discover some chance outlet that has escaped our bewildered vision—we have none of the righteous sense of duty that, assisted by a very proper conveyance, urges a man instinctively whither the pack calls, regardless of all else than of the last spot where the leading couple spoke, or of the clod in a gateway who has “hoorooshed” the fox back in his very track.

We see, perhaps, all we can from a respectful and timorous distance ; but the main part of our fun lies in the relation we can maintain with other riders—holder, maybe, and better and younger than ourselves. And much enjoyment and much merriment we get by the way, except when the flock splits up and we follow the sillier sheep instead of the wiser ones, to find ourselves in that most lamentable of all states—*clean out of it*.

Saturday, Oct. 23, brought “on our side of the country” (wherever that may be) the occasion of the first big field of the half-hatched season—and, though the ditches looked little different from what the haymakers may have found and left them some four months ago, and the hedges were giant in their robes of green, somehow the public took ready heart, and, as it were, impelled one another to view a good deal of what came in the way at about its proper value. Now and again, while all others were at a halt, or groped hither and thither in despair, a meteor would shoot forth from the darkness, and—lancing forward as if bent on self-sacrifice for the common weal—would cleave a way through timber or bullfinch, to release the huddled mob. And as often as not, I noticed, this was no drag hunt exotic or steeplechase darter, but some grizzled old fox-hunter familiar in the white-collared livery. It did the heart good and it warmed the too sluggish pulse to see such feats : for it shows that the fire of the chase is no ephemeral flame. Where were we ? With the Pytchley—I had almost forgotten to say ; for my thoughts were harking to a wide caverned oxer, and to the far-set rail that scarce yielded to a clean and clever pair of heels—yet remained quite big enough. In an aged book of Tales styling itself *An Oriental Collection*, that it was my privilege to read but a week ago, occurred in every few paragraphs the pleading, “but this history must be abbreviated, *lest the reader get an headache*” (a formula that I must remember and repeat in the prolific future). So I need write only of the day that there were foxes enough in the Dodford neighbourhood ; and that twice hounds circled for twenty minutes over that pleasant

district—finding scent but indifferent, even though the well-soaked turf was all their field could want for foothold or for fall.

I am fain to allow that the hunting field of October, even with a pack of fame and fashion, does not behave very well to itself as far as personal adornment goes—the ladies of course excepted, for do they ever insult themselves by self-neglect? and has it not been written that “if she be but young and fair, she hath the grace to know it?” In these days a man has probably in his wardrobe more smoking coats than shooting coats. (By the way, what a radiant field we should have if, on an occasional day, say, once a week on the Leamington side, the order for covert-side parade were “smoking coats!”) A man of the humbler sort—especially unless, as sometimes happens, his tastes in life carry him no further afield than a hot corner and a warm drawing-room—allows himself one decent suit of tweed apparel at a time, in the which he travels, and in which he associates with his country neighbour. For the wife of his bosom and the toilers of the stableyard he reserves the old clo’—already rather “better” than half worn out. In these, too, he carries out his shooting, his colt-schooling, and his general round of work or idleness. The hunting-day then arrives, with a gloomy ceiling significant of drenching showers; and, besides, he is going into a plough country, with a five-year-old and a very fair certainty of a dirty fall. To-morrow the Johnsons are coming to lunch. Mr. J. is always neat and smart as a *novus homo* should be, and pretty Mrs. J. is not at all the sort of woman before whom to appear in a threadbare coat. No, the new garment must stop at home; the shabby jacket go a-hunting; and, somehow or other, the same chain of circumstance and reasoning seems to have had a hand in clothing nine out of ten of his somewhat shabby comrades of the day.

Look to your colours, ye ladies of Leicestershire! To the county of Northampton belong the first honours of justice to the national cloth—the scarlet of heroism in war and chase. What the dames have done for politics and for patriotism, the

brighter sex is now doing for fox-hunting in this old-fashioned shire. Pretty heads have been laid together, treaties have been concluded, Signor Snip has been put on his utmost mettle, and by next week the fashion will be found set, endorsed, and adopted—the same that found such favour last season in sporting Meath. Surely, if men consider they uphold the honour and the popularity of Fox-hunting (“God bless it!”) by clothing their ungainly bodies in pink attire, how much firmer hold will be attained upon the affections of the populace, how much deeper emphasis will be laid on the traditional value of the sport, by the wearing of the symbol by those who are fair to look upon? The principle is right. The practice cannot but be bright and becoming. And, with the ice of novelty once broken, the league of scarlet will soon have a widely-gathered muster-roll.

If naught else comes of October hunting (and the merits of the month hinge almost entirely upon the use made of it—which, again, depends very much upon the views of each M.F.H. as to education of hounds and foxes), it seldom fails to give to us onlookers a pretty fair inkling of what to expect in the near future from each new inmate of our stable. It may even be utilised in a great degree to correct many shortcomings of disposition and acquirement; and, whoever has missed such opportunity (or failed to send another to seize it for him) may, likely enough, soon be seen bewailing his negligence, in shattered hat or battered reputation. What matters it in October, if a young one rolls clumsily through a blind gap, breaks the weakest rail we can find him, or challenges to a twenty minutes’ tussle before he will own that he can jump a fence of any description? ’Tis all in the day’s work—in the day’s pleasure. But in the morrow of November—when everyone will be in a hurry, and the black devil of disappointment shall take the hindermost—such exercise is the province only of the unprepared, or the impecunious (and from a varied experience I can testify pretty accurately to the miseries of either state). Few men, bar such of the gilded youth as have held themselves superior to the

costly fascinations of a Cesarewitch or a Cambridgeshire, are left at the end of October with a sufficient margin to allow of immediate drafting and replacing. The season has to be gone through as it begins—and the worst horses probably drop in for the best runs. No help for it now—we must “rustle” along with what we have, conceal our fears, make a Marathon out of each ponderous failure, and ape the jauntiness of youth, to whom every horse is a “ripper,” and every fence a means of joy.

A FIRST TASTE OF THE OPEN.

A VERY luxuriant autumn is this. The grass grows rankly ; and the ditches are so carefully hidden that a three-season hunter may well be excused for ignoring them—while neither excuse nor apology is needed for the ill-will with which we many-season riders regard the same. Shirk them we do, as rigidly as is possible. But the latter half of October is a seductive time ; and the most self-contained and conscientious abstainers cannot but be now and again dragged out of themselves, in the stirring excitement of a short blind scurry with fox-hounds. So it was, for instance, a few days since, on as wild and wet a morning as ever prepared turf for the approaching fray. *Where* it was, I will not tell you—for tales out of season are tales of October hunting. But no prettier covert looks down on a grassy vale than the ten-acre medley of gorse and broom, privet and bramble, whence broke, at noon of the drenching day in question, the last fox of a lively half-dozen. Some twenty or thirty gruesome-looking mortals with true delight heard the order to go, and hailed the chance to get warm. Well they recognized the wooded knoll looming darkly through the rain, across the fair but stoutly fenced vale. Well aware were they that all their horses were fat ; many indeed still unclipped. But they remembered, too, how freely-gated was that green plain—and fully they realised that among the present little band there would be no rabid ambition for place

or distinction, no striving for imaginary honours, no incitement to avert impression that to other dogs belongs the present day, and that yours must be numbered with the past. So a cracker they rode down the two great pastures; gaily leaped an insignificant gap in the dividing hedge; and lustily galloped for the well-known bridge—over a brook that has witnessed as much discomfiture as ever a stream in the Midlands.

In the natural order of things, a first whip is often called upon to act as pilot—when a huntsman is yet scarcely clear of covert, and hounds are running rather farther in front of their field than they should be (this, remember, being merely an occurrence peculiar to October, and at all other times apparently impossible save through the intervention of river, wire, or similar unforeseen check upon the madding crowd). So now the redoubtable Bill (this name will do as well as any other) is slipping ahead on a lengthy bay that has all the conditional advantages of six weeks' cub-hunting; and that possibly owes his present chance to the possession of a wilful disposition, suggesting the advisability of Bill's determined manipulation for a period previous to full-dress appearance in public. Anyhow, Bill does his duty (as indeed he meets all occasions and all demands requiring instinct, skill, or courage) with the readiest facility; guides a grateful group as directly to gate or gap as if his way were placarded, and hounds on a guiding herring. Deftly he parts the leafy covering that clouds the broad hole in a dense bullfinch; with a sharp little crack, like a mere passing snap of the fingers, he flings aside the single rail that would block the way through an uncompromising stake-and-bound; and with a wriggle and scuffle he demonstrates how easily a horse may be squeezed round a tree where foot-people have trod down the thorn. Content to be led, only too glad to follow, the bruisers string on—while faces grow rapidly red, fat horses sob early, and the pack stride on in advance, over rich pasture and lengthy aftermath. No story need I make—for a fifteen minutes' spin is but a flash in the pan, of the sport-giving pack I speak of—and before whom many an old fox will

surely die this season to a fifty minutes' grace. The straight little cub of to-day finds shelter below ground, a mile from the shaggy height that seemed his aim. In a glow of warmth and pleasure the dripping gallopers disperse for home ; and to-night they will be talking of fences wide and dark, and of timber gigantic—the dreadful shapes and monstrous creations with which we love to overawe a patient after-dinner audience.

THE GALLOPING WHIP.*

If life is a business, existence is fun
When duty and pleasure and sport are in one ;
And so he wears ever a smile on his lip—
'Tis a Labour of Love to the Galloping Whip.

The moon of September's his light in the morn,
When the cub's to be killed and they've carried the corn ;
The moon of December's his lamp for the trip,
As home with the pack goes the Galloping Whip.

For hours never vex him, and work cannot tire,
That dapper pink fits on a framework of wire ;
He'll go without sup, and he'll go without sip
From daylight to dark, will the Galloping Whip.

The phiz of bold Reynard is shaped on his mug,
Mouth wide as an oxer, as deep as a jug ;
That feature was fashioned to scream, not to nip,
And a bumper's no charm for the Galloping Whip.

The last to leave covert, he'll cheer on the pack ;
Twenty couple are out, then away with a crack ;
In a mile he has given the quickest the slip—
The wind from their sails takes the Galloping Whip.

When we're jammed in a corner, the timber too strong,
The bullfinch too thick, and our courage all gone—
Hie ! give us a lead ! and over he'll flip :
But it's little improved by the Galloping Whip.

Does he ride for repute ? No, his eye is ahead ;
He works for his huntsman, and works for his bread.
Wherever he steers men are glad of the tip :
The bruisers delight in the Galloping Whip.

* Republished from "Fore's Quarterly Magazine."

Ever sparing of rate and indulgent of youth,
 His cheer urges Faulty get forrard to Truth ;
 But a rioter determined will never outstrip
 The swift-vengeing thong of the Galloping Whip.

They've run twenty minutes as close as a wedge.
 By Jove ! they have split—two lines since the hedge !
 Old Reefer is right. Up the furrow they rip ;
 And round swing the rest with the Galloping Whip.

A game fox is sinking. The Whip isn't here !
 Look, a cap down the wind ! " Charles has him, I swear !"
 And Reynard, poor devil ! is well in the grip
 Of Whitecollar Will and his Galloping Whip.

PRELIMINARY CANTERS.

NOVEMBER the first of 1886 asserted its calendar rights as the opening of fox-hunting legitimate—when the newspapers can tell us whither to ride, and when we come to the covert side furnished and trimmed, and as spruce as vanity may prompt, or funds allow. You, perhaps, have been through the ordeals (many, and actual, and stern) of the earliest cub-hunting, when you rose with the stable-helper, breakfasted before ever a lark was aloft, and rode abroad with the teamster—wondering if ever a kind Providence would prompt you, too, to whistle aloud at that miserable hour. The first note that shook the dewdrop no doubt served to drive drowsiness from your eyelid, to pluck discontent from your heart, and to bundle dull care backwards over the crupper. The scamper of a frightened cub across a narrow ride, the double twang of a horn, a view holloa from three different quarters at once of a long-familiar wood—and you were a fox-hunter again, as foolish and fervent as when first you rode to the hunt on a shaggy Shetland. Morning after morning would see you still setting forth—on pleasure, no longer on mere duty, bent. And so you worked your way to the recognized opening day, a fitter and physically far better man than if you had remained content to accept things merely in their accorded order.

With the arrival of October and its rainfall, cub-hunting of course assumed its much brighter aspect. The ground softened, the code of discipline expanded, brief scurries into the open became possible and often advisable, the hour of meeting was soon somewhat more human, and men's hearts opened to the change. Galloping was now and then admitted as legitimate; an occasional leap almost justifiable; the glow of exercise and excitement became once more visible; and the ice was fairly broken. With a wetter soil came a better scent. Hounds could hold their cub in hand from find to worry; and the month that we have long learned to look upon as the happiest, because the least overdone yet the most unbroken, of the sporting year, showed forth in its full freshness. "Plenty of foxes, *ca-r-pital* scent, never saw the young lot enter better;" such was the report from every competent mouthpiece in the merry Midlands. It may have differed in degree, and its paragraphs varied in emphasis, but the tune was the same; and I take it that you who are only now plunging *in medias*, with all the pomp and circumstance (*i.e.*, new clothes) of November, may accept the prospects as hopeful in the extreme. Some of you will go to Melton, many will go to Rugby, and a few to Harboro'—too few (for was not Market Harboro' well nigh as mighty, and quite as hard, as Melton itself, within the memory of many who are not so particularly grey nor so very palpably bald and bulky even now). There are other little haunts—very accessible too, and rapidly becoming more fashionable as their merits get whispered abroad. But of these it is high treason in the eyes of the early discoverers to speak save in terms of faintest praise—for what right have strangers from afar to come poaching upon preserves that first settlers had intended keeping strictly for themselves? Have I not—many years ago—heard even a very minor member of the great fox-hunting metropolis deliver himself loudly in such strain, and call malediction fierce on the gross presumption that then dictated new arrivals? 'Tis not very difficult to learn where the cakes and ale of the chase are to be found; and surely these

are products of our native soil that more fairly than aught else may claim all the benefit of free trade. Yet it is not for me to trumpet forth their merits here—an' I would live. There are grass countries besides those that are accessible only by half a day's journey from the great village; and there are more and wilder foxes in small natural woods than where the little gorse coverts must be drawn almost weekly. But I would be neither traitor nor turncoat—so no more of odious comparison.

After all, the Grafton did not give rank to Monday, Nov. 1, as their opening day; but a good day's killing was achieved. Besides, in the case of many horses and no few men, an extra and lengthy day's preparation such as this could not but be productive of benefit. Plenty of us are called upon to buy more than one horse at the very last moment. We can buy the animal (no difficulty at all, I assure you, in the Midlands, where every second man has a large supply on hand with which to suit all customers), but we can't buy condition. (No, don't contradict me, sir, I know your horses have been doing "no end of slow work all summer," but you can't afford to have them fine-drawn, and you know you don't keep them long enough to have them hard as well as big.) Now, if we drop into a gallop with one that is soft—are the chances much more than even against that horse knocking himself to pieces for the season? With a recent purchase (no matter whence) a long day's dawdling and a few sharp canters can only be fraught with good. And again, we have not all been trying young ones in Ireland, or even enjoying a weekly bump round the riding school throughout the summer. The bread of idleness, or even the hard-earned dainties of a well provided shooting lodge, are in their different way and degree anything but good preparation for the saddle and for the exactions of a covert-side toilet. Absolute inactivity of course produces a frame that is only fit for filling a lounge; but even sturdy pedestrianism fails to mould, or in other words to attenuate, to the elegancies of the pigskin. A stalwart deerstalker, I warrant, suffers as a rule more severely when he shifts from knickerbocker and worsted

into breeching and booting than does even the softer product of the London pavement. There is a lean and active kind, it is true, that forms yet another variety—a type similar to the raw-boned shikari of the East. These never fatten, and they cannot work thinner; they walk and they ride; they neither tire nor need they starve themselves—“A Leicestershire leg, my dear fellow, as straight as a cane and as thin as a crop. A bucket of rain won't wet my stocking till my fellow succeeds in stretching my new tops!” But with the many (supposing always that they have any decent regard for appearances and any thought for the future as induced by six days a week up to Christmas) the first adjustment of duly connecting etceteras is a process of difficulty, that too often ripens during the day of trial to a state of positive agony.

A word in season. Four days one week and five the next (*i.e.* without training) offer an allowance not discreditable to any hunting quarter. This is an average obtainable where, as in this quiet corner, five different packs all touch a little circle as many miles in width. It needs no oracle to proclaim that the duty of every hunting man (bent on eking the maximum of enjoyment out of the winter, and who counts every day lost as an atom of life unfulfilled) is to let no single opportunity slip, leave no chance unseized, of getting to the covert-side ere winter has really time to assert her claim as his doorkeeper. *After* Christmas let him hunt as often as he can. Before Christmas *every* day—if hounds are to be reached and a sound horse is in the stable. November is the month of sound horse—and had we not ten weeks of frost in young 1886? It so happens that Tuesdays are the almost universal discard by packs hunting the Rugby and Weedon district. He must be a man singularly without resource, and boasting a quite lamentable immunity from the casual worries and anxieties of this life, who cannot find occupation of some other kind on this one day. On every other of the week he is beneficently treated: and if at the end of the season he can look back upon his Tuesdays as the only occasions of absence from hounds, he will surely not be able to

call himself to account on the score of wasted opportunities, in this line. There is another way of looking at it—without running exactly counter to the admonition of *carpe diem* aforestated. Six days a week (without a nap immediately before or after dinner) will make the strongest man if not actually stale, at least not every day sensitive of such ready and keen enjoyment as he is well capable of when content with five. I may be wrong; but I could name few, if any, instances to the contrary. Let each please himself as best he may or can. But go for six days, go for five—go for one day a week—do not put it off till after Christmas!

With the Grafton on Monday, Nov. 8—after meeting at Woodford, and realising once more the worth of the triplet—A white frost, a bright sun, and a scentless morning. I think I saw more foxes flitting from hounds on Monday than it was ever my privilege to view before. During the early part of the day, from Woodford, hounds pushed a line through Fawsley Park in spite of a number of the deer running actually *with* the pack. Yet not even a single puppy turned her head to the tempting accompaniment. Surely hounds were seldom subjected to a higher test! It comes to memory, though (and I quote altogether without any desire to discount the performance above-mentioned) that the Rev. John Russell, of hallowed memory, for ten years hunted fox, hare, and occasionally deer, with one and the same pack—and he averred strongly that his hounds never changed from the animal under pursuit. Must not this have been due to natural instinct rather than to deep subjection?—though his wondrous voice had, I believe, more power to enforce his will among the deep rocky coombes of Devonshire than the help of two ready whips would have conveyed for most men in an open and rideable country.

Slowly they worked their way through the dread neighbourhood of Fawsley—easy enough, however, with its manifold gates at the present pace—to the wooded upland of Mantel's Heath. There can be no shame in confessing—what is common to all of us hereabouts—a feeling of unmiti-

gated terror and dislike towards those Fawsley doubles, which can surely only have been planted there for the pronounced purpose of interfering with foxhunting at some period of the 18th century. No farmer and no landlord of the present day could afford so extravagant a means of marking his dislike towards his neighbours or to the popular sport (were such a feeling possible), for they cover a width of in many cases at least ten yards apiece. More often the first fence alone is repellant enough to turn all comers aside. But should you be deluded enough to accept an apparent opening and make your way on to the bank, you are likely to find yourself in a far worse plight yet—surrounded by thick jungle that forthwith lays hands on your hat and face, and confronted by new oak rails or an impossible bullfinch, with a ditch of unknown dimension beyond. You are at once, in fact, on the horns and thorns of a cruel dilemma. You must elect between the agonies of physical cowardice or the humiliation of moral pluck. For the way out points to the certainty of a cropper, to be taken at a stand or walk (ugh !), while to go back must entail upon you the well-merited jeers of comrades in waiting. Some men may like the situation. I admit that such few trials as I have ventured upon have brought for me anything but a sensation of perfect happiness, but on the contrary left me firmly determined to try no more—till I am younger.

FOXHUNTING IN EARNEST.

Saturday, November 20th.—As the leaves drop off, how the crowd drops in ! To-day's attendance on the Pytchley at Welton Place has been as ten to one compared with their Badby meet of a fortnight previous. Racegoing is nearly a dead letter ; half the tame pheasants of the British Isles have been already gathered ; half the best guns have been sent into store, and as many new coats brought out. Has not the long swinging stride of a bold fox leaving his lair power to raise

tumult stronger and gayer than ever the swish of a rocketter breaking the sunlight? The pistol-like cracks of a ding-dong finish may well carry excitement with them—albeit that excitement is but the quivering gamble of £ s. d.—the greed of money to be gained or the despair of lucre lost. You will make no money at *our* game: but there is still your little gamble. The stake is Sport—to see it or to fail. Luck may have some little hand in the result—but your own manhood a good deal more. We are all losers at times; and, believe me, loss is as bitter as success is entrancing. No involvement of the coin-of-the-realm could enhance or detract from either. I speak not of triumph over other men or of the degradation of being worsted. The man who rides jealously rides not to *hounds*. He and his bravery are misplaced and unappreciated in the sphere of foxhunting. Besides, taking a season through, he is “not in it” with the men whose sole effort is to be with hounds, irrespective altogether of where others may be placed. These will see most of the runs, and will see them with credit. Jealousy will as often cut himself out while aiming to cut down; will seldom fail to annoy the huntsman; and is certain to interfere with sport.

But of all sorts and of both sexes, fair and unfair, jealous and sportloving, habited and pipeclayed, they were present on Saturday as thick as the blackberries at the covert-side—Braunston Gorse to wit. What omen, by the bye, are we to attach to a crop so unprecedented as that which decks the hedges this autumn of 1886? Nothing to do with foxhunting any how, you will say. But it *had*, and it *may have*. It had, because a thirsty foxhunter was then and there busy pointing a moral at this very covert-side—plucking and gobbling the precious fruit till Goodall's horn tented him off and wafted him away. “Better than *any* brandy-and-soda!” he explained with all the gusto that a full and thirsty mouth would allow; and away he galloped a better, leaving us a wiser, man. Again, it *may have*; for it may, or must, mean something—perhaps a hard, perchance an open, winter in store. We shall see.

Meanwhile, November is hardly a winter month—though an early spell of frost has too often set in before the date on which the printer's devil shall handle this trifling. I would not waste your time—after the fashion of the little handgate at Braunston Gorse that frittered the precious moments for a swollen troop striving and squeezing. Sand through a minute-measure ; Her Majesty's faithful servants doing homage at a Levée ; a magnum of champagne dealt out in liqueur glasses—are all similes natural but wholly insufficient, to convey a notion of the fight between self-control and the aggravation of delay, such as attends the progress of a Pytchley, or other "too-many-by-half" field, through a handgate at starting. And all the squeeze led this time to little or nothing. The "scented zephyr" of the huntsman blows for most from the East. It must be specially so for the good man whose office it is to exhibit to the best advantage the show of the shop, Braunston Gorse—though the antithesis may be appropriate when his Lordship views the same vale from Shuckburgh's entrancing heights. The wind now came directly from the valley ; and Reynard obeyed the prompting as readily and unhesitatingly as the world accepts ill tidings. By Bragboro', to lose at Ashby St. Ledgers Park, was the run from Braunston—given under circumstances of some little jumping, no little nice hunting, and a waning scent. But the lesson of an otherwise uneventful ride was provided on reaching Ashby St. Ledgers Park, at the hands of Mr. Goodman of Catesby—as sturdy a yeoman as ever bred a bullock or made a hunter. Objecting to locked gates on principle, as being incompatible with the due co-operation of foxhunters and farmers, he turned his four-year-old short round ; and, ignoring the hesitating throng now clustering at the gate, lifted him over some five feet of ghastly timber next to the latch-post. Offer me a dukedom, or a pack in a grass country free of all cost (the latter for choice)—I would have hung my head and slunk round, whatever my mount, rather than followed him. The plain moral of such bold proceeding was obvious enough. Foxhunters are in a great degree dependent upon farmers. But

farmers *will* ride the country—and farmers *can* if “foxhunter” can’t—whether the shepherd has remembered to unlock his gates or has left the keys at home.

Monday, Nov. 22.—The Grafton opened the new week on a bright frosty morning at Preston—or rather Little Preston, for custom has it in Northamptonshire, where two hamlets of similar insignificance adjoin, that they shall be clubbed together under one title (possibly as one parish) but allowed to retain each its separate measure of importance under the heading of Great and Little. Perhaps it was owing to the fact that only the lesser Preston was named as the meet, that so remarkably few robes of red lit up the gathering? Far be it from me to commit the impertinence of cavilling at a fashion that depends solely on personal choice on the part of the people most concerned. But it is indisputable that on the gay hues of the dress of its worshippers depend all the bright aspect and half the fascination of an assemblage about to pay practical homage to foxhunting. Afterthought almost bids me erase such comment at the lips of one steeped to the throat in the oldest of black. But let it stand. It was prompted by a due regard for truth; and as for its author, “please, sahib, my very poor man.”

The coverts of the Prestons are a little wood of that name, another of similar class known as Hogstaff—and in the latter was found the first fox, who led us for ten or fifteen minutes for a half circle on the green sward, returning to be killed at the entrance to the Park. A second fox, in duplicate or triplicate, was forthcoming at Charwelton Osier Bed. Over the wide Fawsley pastures the pack fairly flew for twenty minutes; and gates made progress not only very possible, but quick enough to enable all who did not mind wetting their boots at a deep early ford, to keep hounds in view or reach. Glorious ground for hounds is this rich grazing district; but, as I have said before and repeatedly, acceptable from a rider’s point of view chiefly when its many gates come handy. In the clear sunlight of to-day many a weak spot was discoverable in these

veils of thorns (I mean the Fawsley doubles)—possible routes that seemed to have no existence while the screen was in all its pristine density of leaf. But this may, after all, have been but the passing fancy of a fugitive bold in the presence of a line of gates. We were not obliged to jump anything. And nobody has yet come down from Hanwell to ride over the Fawsley fences for a lark. A circle to the Hall in question completed the gallop, and a dying scent afterwards flickered out 'twixt Byfield and Griffin's Gorse.

Wednesday, Nov. 24, brought a multitude truly enormous to hunt with the Pytchley at Misterton. 'Tis difficult to suppose that even Christmas can make the many, more. For whence are they to come? The settlers are all at their cabins of comfort; and already the L. and N. W. R. finds its stock of horse-boxes inadequate. (This was I informed, when sentenced to a twenty-mile ride this morning.) The meaning and application of the term "spring captains" has never been adequately explained to me. Certain am I, at any rate, that it has no significance whatever in these improved times. For, besides the locals and the Leamingtonians, a large majority of the weekly pilgrims on the iron road are, at this excellent season of the year, men-at-arms, bent on maintaining due efficiency in the most important section of their training, to wit, the exercises of horsemanship and foxmanship.

If omen, augury, and the rudiments of Rugby-teaching avail anything, surely your representative penman had every reason to anticipate with some certainty a day of happiest event. To me—but I may adapt the poet still closer, and if my translation seems inapt, just borrow a Horace, or, if you like, ask Mr. Smart's assistance with his English version of Satire IX., Lib. 1—then ride your hunter to covert for a score of miles along Dick Turpin's Roman Road, being careful to follow it through the Crick fields. "*Ibam forte Watling-street*" (a wholly unexpected treat). To me there appeared no *corvus sinister*, but a whole flight of noisy merry rooks on my right hand amicably escorting the quaintest companion that ever winged it over

Northamptonshire (not even excepting the quick and lengthy heavy-weight who, from Weedon in years gone by, did such credit to the Flying Horse Artillery and to his own bird-sobriquet).* An enormous white cockatoo, resplendent with yellow head-plume, repeated in his Punch-and-Judy voice as he passed almost overhead, "Good morning, good morning!" Then, leaving his dusky comrades, he perched himself on a tree by the roadside, placidly to watch us as long as we rode in sight. A true bill this—on my word and on that of my disinterested companion, and bearing at least the likelihood of truth, inasmuch as this curious well-wisher appeared in the form of no after-dinner phantom, but as a wayside apparition to a couple of sober, and somewhat sulky, foxhunters jogging unwillingly to covert, two hours after breakfast and a full hour behind time.

But all hindrances and all by-the-way interruptions notwithstanding, they were there to add two more particles to the torrent sweeping past Misterton Reedbed after fox and hounds about noon on Wednesday. The road to Lutterworth is a broad one; but it was filled full for half a mile, and afterwards sprinkled for half an hour to come, with gallopers of every degree. Misterton Hall is a centre spot of fox-preserving that has few equals even in this very hunting shire. If a dozen foxes get into hounds' mouths here during a season, at least two dozen survive on their native ground. Foxes of a certain age have necessarily learned the more distant neighbourhood; the youngsters are content to remain within call of so good a home. The first fox of Wednesday probably obeyed the instincts of youth, in evincing a shifty reluctance to go far. But the scent was too good, and the Pytchley bitches too quick, to allow him to dally in comfort. He crossed over to the plantation at the northern end of Shawell Wood, touched Cotesbach Village, and, by a very quick forward movement on the part of the huntsman, was brought into view on the banks of the little river Swift. The latter was bridged; but not so

* General Greene.

a deep-cut second dyke on the nearer side. Hemmed and pressed, the field were huddled in almost laughable helplessness on its brink. Horses would not face its ugly insignificance. Four were eventually got over: but as—amid the vain medley of whacking, spurring and whispered enunciation—I failed to recognize all but one rider, a very gallant and valued friend, I am compelled to refrain from the liberty of specifying the quartette who alone saw, properly and deservedly, the best and final quarter-hour of this run. I should add that the bottom of this watercourse was in most places a sound gravel, and it was in fact a very easy kind of “rhene.” But these vaunted hunters of the shires were in most cases superior either to jumping or fording it. A Grafton lady alone succeeded in insisting successfully on the latter: though I believe that there are two or three very angry men riding up and down the drain still. They seemed at any rate to have taken up permanent quarters therein, when I for one left for the night exhausted by useless effort. This quarter of an hour was by Bitteswell Village round Lutterworth; and we were all—*i.e.*, not less than two hundred and fifty of us—present when Reynard was pulled down about a mile from the little town in question—the chase having taken just about an hour.

Longer by thirty or forty minutes was the hunt of the afternoon, after a fox of somewhat similar initiatory tastes, but still more strongly acted upon by the vigorous compulsion of hounds and huntsman. Misterton Gorse was his home, and he took a complete circle nearly round the manor before consenting to go abroad. On the first supposition that a straightaway gallop was mapped out for them, more men than I have ever seen tempting each other on to encounter a very undeniable peril (if my too timorous view of things is at all worth credence), went one and all for a double stile through the narrow plantation above the covert. It is true that the second timber was only visible when the first had been accomplished (which by the way was necessarily into the gaunt arms of an overhanging chestnut tree). It is true also that the same chestnut tree quite

shut out from view two entirely successful summersaults performed in due course by the fated among the first essayists. It is true, moreover, that two fields more of fast riding told those who did come out of the situation still on horseback, that they needn't have done it at all. A crowd was determined to go this way : and quite a crowd went. For, indeed, the men of white collars (with many and many others whom they are good enough to bid to share the fun with them) *will* ride. They rode in full form to-day, and yet no one, I think, could say that, amid all the difficulties of two lengthy hunts, they rode otherwise than fairly. Excellent country stood in their way when this fox at length went forth into the open from Swinford Corner past the right of Swinford Village, nearly straight to Lilbourne station. Turning down wind then, scent waned greatly ; but hounds worked the line up the river-side to Swinford Old Covert, quicker round Stanford Hall Park, across river and railway towards the Hemplow. In the midst of this wild grass region their fox seemed utterly beat, turned back to Yelvertoft station, and yet, after crawling the hedgerows thereabouts, managed to drag himself out of scent.

And now, "lest the reader should get an headache, &c., &c." Space fortunately prevents my recurring at any length to such mishaps as a good sportsman's horse turning, riderless, over a high gate in view of all, and his owner arriving to find his best hunter crippled in the back. Nor under any circumstances should I be justified in recalling beyond as an incidental fact, that mud-covered habits were as many in number as earth-stained coats.

A ROUGH WEEK.

YEAR by year, I notice, men of the Midlands still further accept and adopt the principle of mounting themselves *above their weight*. A fourteen-stone hunter is in this year of grace the natural conveyance for a rider of calibre or ambition, be he even a featherweight. In fact, such a horse would seem to offer

the only proper foundation upon which the public now build reasonable hope of crossing a strong country in safety. And there is no little soundness in the notion. A big well-balanced horse can carry himself, and nine times out of ten will carry a rider too—be the latter qualified to do little more than merely “remain.” It is more or less a matter of indifference to the former what the latter is about. They interfere but little with one another. A little horse, on the contrary, requires a master-hand to do him justice, where the ground is deep and fences tall and strong. In years past I have run over many a sheet of paper in pursuance of the argument of Big Horse *versus* Little. Now I have only to say that advocacy of size is put forward by common practice. It is recognized that horses of weight and substance go easier over the ground, tire less in jumping, and often scatter without inconvenience a fence that would turn a lighter animal on to his head. I believe I am right in asserting that there are a dozen fourteen-stone horses at the covert-side nowadays to one that was to be seen ten years ago—and they show as much breeding as any of the lighter ones. The professional “thrusters” who have money or credit are seldom seen on little animals. The dealers keep very few of them; and the farmers find they don’t pay. You must go *through* quite as many places in these countries of grass as you can ever jump over—and in so doing weight must tell. Breeders are obviously aiming to produce size; for buyers will have nothing else. Sixteen hands, up to the weight of a man in full bloom, sired by a thoroughbred and with a dam whose pedigree has scarcely a suspicion of stain—such is the vehicle upon which a man of means is alone content to take his chance with the rest. Even the bulkiest of our contemporaries “assume a virtue if they have it not;” order the clipping machine to be kept closely at work on Smiler’s rounded heels, and under the guidance of their dealer’s glib invention palm off their ponderous provincial as own brother to Melton. A little nippy horse, ridden by a little nippy but powerful man, will perform great feats, and in the neatest fashion, as has been instanced by many

a mount in the hands of such artists as Capt. Smith and Custance. But such a class of horse is woefully unsuitable to six feet of leggedness, however limber, while to a duffer of any build he constitutes a source of positive unseaworthiness when difficulties run strong and high. But ignoring all argument as to choice, it is a matter of apparent fact that average sportsmen, as produced hereabouts, ride more powerful horses now than they were wont to when we were ten years' better men. Yet, as long ago as 1842 Mr. Apperley put in the mouth of Captain Barclay (who, however, was of athletic rather than of riding fame): "Purchase your hunters with more strength than merely required to carry your weight. Never buy horses that are not at least a stone above it!" And now having brought out my text at the end of my little sermon, I may let you go.

Saturday, December 4th, opened with pouring rain; and Goodall brought the pack to Badby Wood. But it must have been a perilous journey from kennels and back. Hunting was out of the question; for even the turf had not given a bit. It was better towards afternoon, and at least allowed exercise and rumination—which at least is as profitable as "the feast of reason and the flow of soul," provided at this merry season for stay-at-home sportsmen, in the shape of complete and exact report on the backslidings of their fellow creatures in sin.* The meets of the week to come had just arrived; and a softened atmosphere gave prospect of our yet going through a truly choice programme. The country wears its pleasantest aspect as one views it longingly and expectantly from a hack saddle. The hedges have cast off the last shred of their autumn clothing and relapsed into the becoming scantiness of seasonable attire. As compared with the heavy dark structures of a month or six weeks ago, they are positively tempting—when contemplated from a position of safety. ('Tis a very different thing when they stare you straight and grimly in the face with a "No, sir, you don't come this way!") And in fact we ought to be riding to hounds—there can be little doubt of that.

* Allusion to certain *causes célèbres* in process of being thrashed out.

Anticipation is a vain thing—and never more vain than when wrapped in the fancied future of fox-hunting. But for the life of me, I can't help looking at that card again. Monday, Grafton or Pytchley—each in a district very suitable indeed for putting the last new buy to the test. Tuesday—well, training is an expensive form of getting to covert, and we can better afford to devote the day to schooling and to scribbling (if so be that Monday will vouchsafe us a subject). Wednesday—what better in the wide, wide world than North Kilworth?—must have a creditable representative under the saddle that day, or certainly be lost among the camp followers of the Pytchley host. Thursday, Lower Shuckburgh, so help me Nimrod! Friday Ashby St. Ledgers—may be Braunston Gorse and Paradise in the afternoon. Saturday Prior's Marston, the choicest and remotest corner that is hunted by the hounds of Warden Hill. Let me out—to gasp with excess of hope and inhale the breath of kind heaven. By all that's — it's freezing again; and on Monday I'll be driven to making "copy" on the premises, an occupation about as delicious as building your own cigars out of cabbage leaves of home growth! Two days' frost is quite sufficient to tell any man all he wants to know about his own stable and how it is working on, or otherwise. For one other day he may entrap a few deluded friends to submit with decent serenity to the ordeal of observing ten or a dozen horses stripped in succession—each rather better than the other, and one and all considerably more accomplished than anybody else's—a good many of them moreover furtively watching for a chance to expel the unwilling intruder *vi et armis* (which means by ivory or iron). But even in the indulgence of so simple and charming a resource as this, the noble owner must exercise a fair degree of caution as to his subject, or gnashing of teeth rather than gratification may be his lot. "The old soldier" is not to be depended upon to conceal his nonchalance; a youngster, on the other hand, may by a ruthless and untutored flippancy destroy at a blow all the smooth complacency that his enthusiastic and wholly undeserved

praise of old Timbersmasher has just established—by calling attention to the too obvious deformity of Sunbeam's battered legs. "Capital bone, hasn't she? How much does she measure below the knee?" Unhappy boy. "Have another cigar. I don't think we'll look at any more horses!" The well-crusted cynic, again, is even more, because he is intentionally, brutal. He ignores at once your half-uttered panegyrics—nipping in the very bud by commenting, in tones of a man making new and important discoveries yet too generous to retain all the advantages thereof for his own use, on each and every defect in your shapely collection that has been an eyesore to you for months or even years! "Did I build the horse myself?" or "How long do you suppose I've had him in my stable before I found that out?" is a retort that exasperated Proprietor would give worlds to utter. But he has brought it on himself. All he can do is to hate that man.

A HUNTSMAN'S DIARY, AND MINE.

FOX-HUNTING is a large subject. (If it were not, you might say, a man could scarcely go on drivelling upon it for twenty years on end.) But without the incentive of its exciting phases, the enthusiast's pen had better be amplified into a ploughshare. Hare-hunting is, I am told, quite as scientific a pursuit, and for all I know may be fully as prolific as a subject. No it isn't. Yes, again, it may be. Personally, I see quite as much fun from a back seat in five minutes with foxhounds as the most observant among hare-hunters would be likely to glean in an hour—a space of time that I understand is about the average preparation for currant jelly. But if in those five minutes Larkins takes such a comical tiptopper over timber that anyone but his own mother must laugh at intervals for the rest of the day; if Jumpkinson cuts down the whole field by landing half-way into a brambly bottom; or if Martin becomes the receptacle of M.F.H.'s loud and righteous wrath because

Mumford rode over hounds but had *vous* enough to turn under the bullfinch, while poor little Martin, who never did worse than jump after somebody else as close as he dared, was carried on to his doom—none of these things are for the forthcoming weekly. It's a merry game, truly. But most of its comedy is contained in the personal discomfiture of Tom and Harry for Dick's amusement. And though Dick, Tom, and Harry seldom let each other off—they are not performing for edification of the printer's devil. In a rattling run, Richard, Thomas, and Henry become perhaps public property; their patronymics or their pseudonyms are in everybody's mouth; and posterity might suffer if not taken into confidence. But as to who was first to drive hounds over the line, who led a lot of sinners to tumble into a lane which the fox had run down. Don't name him, sir, or I'll —— him, must be the natural thought of men who keep hounds. And concurrency of sentiment on the part of a writer to hounds cannot but prompt strong control even over a voluble pen.

Friday, December 11.—To-day found a much-improved state of things prevalent for the Pytchley meet at Ashby St. Ledgers—though the roads were crisp and snow-sprinkled, and a clear sky sparkled ominously. The initial duty of the diary-keeper is, I take it, to summarise that with which he proposes to deal, giving some idea whether there is a story in store, a bare record of small events, or a mere outbreak of fancy such as is the produce of frost and indoor life. I pretend to no omniscience or omnipresence; but the material for a straight good run has not come within my ken in the first six weeks of this season of '86—'87, though I have battled hard to follow hounds five days out of seven up to date. Friday was an enjoyable day, a hound day and a huntsman's day. But when those two well-earned masks have been fixed to the kennel door, Dec. 11th will be sunk in oblivion—unless the keen ladies of the Pytchley pack care to retain its memory, to whet their already most adequate energy against their next visit this way. Goodall's diary (if he has leisure to keep one) probably runs thus—"First

fox. Ashby Spinnies. Ploughman said he had gone into a road drain. Always talk so, those fellows. Don't raise a noise! Let's make it safe down wind. Do stand still a minute, *please gentlemen!* Give the hounds a chance! Huic, little bitches! Fut, fut, fut! Puzzled it out beautiful to back of Barby. Big fences gave 'em a chance: and a check set folks talking in the road—till hounds slipped nearly all the lot, and sprung round the grass at back of village like wildfire. Back to Ashby Ledgers, but didn't go in. Lor, how they blazed after him then—till we set him up in a spinney! And, blessed if they didn't holloa away a fresh one! They might ha' known better. Nipped back and killed him, though. Forty-five minutes. Braunston Cleeves afternoon. Two in front up to Bragboro'. So they say: but sometimes it's one fox, sometimes it's three. Everybody likes to see a fox. (Wish they weren't always so certain about his being fresh one or run one. Think I must hold a class at Brixworth during summer months, and get one of those painting chaps to draw the curl of a tired fox's back on a black-board. *Clean's* nothing to do with it. A few gorse bushes will brighten up any grass-run fox in five minutes, fit for stuffing! But this wasn't just now.) A good killing scent. Skirted Ashby Village. Chap in woodyard wanted to break our necks. Put those rails up himself, no doubt. Road right and left brought 'em all upon hounds quite as quick, too. But at Welton the field held to the road, while hounds hugged the dairy meadows, and a few of our old customers let off after them. Crossed the road through the thick of the horses. Little bitches wouldn't be denied. Down to the bit of a brook. Ever so many stirred up the mud. Can't think why the gentlemen want to tumble about so! We Hunt servants can't afford to do it. Some that I know would catch it if they did. At Thrupp's Spinney the rascal lay down among two or three fresh foxes. Drove him out and round. Killed in hedgerow. Just an hour. Dashed if they didn't deserve him. 'Been two straight foxes, 'been a rare day's sport. Time enough yet though."

On *Monday, December 13*, the Grafton met with an equally

brilliant scent—on a day similarly quiet, grey, and sporting. But, different to Saturday's experience elsewhere, their fox was short-running and the country some of the worst in the Hunt. The Belvoir Heath or the Bicester Flat offer very similar ground to such as exists between Blisworth and Towcester. But there was a killing scent: and hounds ran none the less gloriously because the light red soil was mostly turned up for root and barley-growing, and the hedges were chiefly boundary marks or sheep guards, with many a bridle-road to lend still further facility to the careful galloper. I cannot pretend to an intimacy with this part of a very varied country; nor, were I in the full youth of ambition, should I feel drawn to this particular section. But commend me to this arena if a crack pack were always to carry such a head over it as on Monday. Their fox, sturdy if not straight, never had a chance before them. He gained, moreover, a full minute at starting from Nun Wood, through the intervention of a flock of sheep in each of two first fields. As he turned away from the edge of the Plane Woods, the pace warmed up, and they raced him round to (I believe it was) the Cottage Plantation by Easton Park—as quick a twenty minutes as is often galloped. On thence, across a certain extent of grass, broken by road and quarry-tramway, till, after forty and odd minutes, they had their fox to ground under the Watling-street road, about two miles north of Towcester town. There are times in fox hunting when a rider had best be brave. There are times again when he had better be clever, or at least follow some one who is clever and accomplished. In the fastest and earliest part of this gallop, the brave were all pounded—while the clever and their following had an easy time alongside the pack. *Verbum sap.*

With true gratitude and with never a qualm of shame I view the fact that I was not called upon to hunt on Tuesday. I (that is, *I* who am much as other men, in my desire to combine some sense of comfort with as free as possible indulgence in the pleasures of the chase, and who am called upon often to write a representative *ego* to express in some small measure the views

of a class), well I do not mind a wet skin—except under such circumstances as demand aid from a plough team. Nor do I prefer to stay at home because my stirrup-irons feel cold through my boots. But I *don't* like a driving pitiless rain from the north-east, that soaks me in ten minutes and turns me into an ice pudding for as long as I can stay in the saddle. Do you? And I never yet saw a run in such weather, did you? So I am glad no hounds invited us to come out and look for one on Tuesday.

If Wednesday was again under the ban of foul weather, Thursday was all that the most delicate and particular of fox-hunters could desire. The North Warwickshire came to Hilmorton on a bright still morning, specially fashioned for inviting storm-stricken sportsmen to come forth and air their feathers. Many of them must have lagged in coming; for the very ready fox that went away so instantly from Hilmorton Gorse had an attendance in his wake of not more than fifty souls, as against fully two hundred who rode out to sun themselves during the day. From the gorse of Hilmorton to that of Crick is not much more than a five minutes' scamper, even when the meadows are wet and water-holding as now. (Surely never were the Shires in such an universal flood as in this wild December of 1886.) After a halt at Crick Covert, scent became hopelessly weak: and it was soon necessary to take hounds on to Cook's Gorse. From the latter a rapid and lively start was soon attained, as I will endeavour to sketch in a few words. Two fields below Cook's Gorse runs a brook, at which quite as much fun has been seen year by year as at those of Twyford, Whissendine, Manton, Stonton, *et hoc genus omne*. The way down these fields happens just now to be cut and imperilled by the most complete possible system of cross drainage; and as we blundered over these close-recurring traps we had ample time to recognize the fact that a brimful brook, as yet screened off by a high bullfinch, was running in all its yellow earnestness directly across our front. The tall hedge pierced, a view was at once disclosed that shut the door of

escape to all whose longing fancy had brought to mind ford to the left or bridge to the right. The leading hounds were streaming up the yonder pasture, the tail hounds just shaking the glistening water from their ribs. Mr. Lort Philips was driving a shower of spray heavenward; but, falling on the further bank, was in his saddle again as he made way for his whip to land in his tracks. Left of him some fifty yards, the brook banks were just clear above the flood. Here was the safest jump on this hand, quickly seized by Mr. Frank Osborn and one or two others—till this point of exit became choked, in common with nearly every other tempting spot near by. On the right, meanwhile, the twelve-foot brimmer (it could scarcely have been more) had been skimmed by Mr. Greig, Capt. Middleton, Capt. Beatty, Messrs. Stirling-Stewart, Horne, Guthrie, and the farmer who pushes his three excellent chestnut horses along so well. These, with at the most four others, succeeded in crossing the Rubicon before it became impassable, filled bank high by its too usual complement of men and horses. Bearing to the right at once, recrossing the brook this time by a bridge, hounds raced their fox round to Bilton Grange—the coverts of which he entered in view in twelve minutes, over grass and water. Killed him ten minutes after.

HOW WE FALL—AND HOW PREVENT IT.

It were almost well to have sounded the little Tiber of Northern Warwickshire on Thursday of last week, that at least some active memory—even if nursed with gruel and hot flannels—might help over the stagnate waste of Friday and Saturday. Hard as iron, bright as steel, the former morning set its seal upon kennel and stable door, bidding us turn where else we might for exercise or interest—for this was to be a Christmastide of the true old fashion. The holiday can, perhaps, be well afforded by many. For most men's studs are all too small for their ambition; and the wear and tear of several

open weeks have resulted in confining rather than expanding aspiration.

If I hunt two days a week, it makes me sad to see Smith and Jones pass my door with colours flying on a third morning, which is as a matter of course of the most perfect hunting type, whereas my lot has been cast on two wild profitless days altogether devoid of sport or pleasure. If I hunt three days, hounds are pretty certain to come rollicking across the neighbouring meadows when I am tamely taking heel and toe exercise on the afternoon of the fourth day. If I eke out four days, it is certain I miss the best run of the week on the fifth. Five days round home inevitably lead to one's turning to Bradshaw for a hint as to the possibility of acquiring a sixth. Give me six days—and I would gladly re-arrange the calendar, that June and July might set the church-bells going thrice a week, and the warden's be thus relieved from their expensive and not invariably successful efforts to put warmth into frozen flooring-stones.

How excruciating, to change the subject, is the chill conveyed by stirrup irons of English make and custom, on such bitter cold days as we have encountered of late! A thin boot and a bright steel stirrup in a North East wind will, I undertake to say, inflict pain almost as acute as the bastinado (a form of retribution, however, only known to me at present by hearsay). But I can speak from some personal experience of the fact, that in excessively cold climates a wooden stirrup is actually a guard against cold where an iron one would inevitably entail frostbite. I see there are stirrups advertised as lined with rubber. Some of you have doubtless tried them—and their experience might possibly convey a boon to the "tenderfoot." For my part, I intend at once to commit myself to the extravagance of a pair, to be used on such days as the iron fox over the stable has his nose to the north. But as of all the terrors that appeal vividly to my craven soul none comes home with greater force than the dread of being "hung up," those rubberlined stirrups shall be worn only on a safety stirrup-bar.

But of falling—and to this subject at all events I have given diverse and multiplied trial; and have good hopes of continuing the series for many a year to come. For let a man once experience for long enough the false enjoyment of a total immunity from falls, a cropper will surely become a matter of dread, and his personal safety will occupy his mind far more engrossingly than the sport which is the nominal object of his outing. Now in the district in which I am told off to hunt I see many falls accepted—very often courted. And latterly I have learned to sum them up into two classes, each typical of the country that occasions them. In the light and woolly arable into which so much of the soil directly south of Weedon naturally resolves itself, there are as many loose horses daily to be seen as ever in the strongest area of grass over which the Pytchley flyers disport themselves. But in the one scene they roll casually and easily, in the other they turn over with a bound and impetus that will make the fall remembered. And, oddly enough, the better horses are often entrapped to tumble in the former, while in the latter the animal comes down only because he is not good enough to stand up. In other words, a second-class but skilful horse will do well in the one country, while in the other he is not nearly so pleasant a mount as a half-taught performer of higher calibre and more resolution. The most elastic of horsemen can scarcely assert with truth that a fall of any description is an enjoyable addition to his day's pleasuring; but it remains a matter of taste, and is quite open to argument, as to whether a smasher on the grass or a shaker on the plough is the lesser evil.

Wednesday, December 22nd.—Looks less like skating, and more like an open and merry Christmas than the past week gave reason to expect. Skating is no more in my line than it is in that of an earth stopper: so I can pretend to no regrets on that head. Besides, with a prescience begotten perhaps of last winter's frosty experience, I had organised an alternative occupation, much more in keeping with my training and with the narrowed view through which I am content to regard and concentrate all that

is acceptable of English winter pursuits. Like many other men whose fate and duty it is to teach their own horses, I happen to have built a kind of double corral which I term The Ring, and which my stablemen persist in denominating The Circus. Round this every young horse that comes into my possession is called upon to exercise himself before being formally entered as a hunter. And here he can rap his knees at his pleasure, or blunder on to his head as often as he chooses, without opportunity of causing harm or fright to a rider. He thus learns, quickly and with little risk to himself, that strong timber is not to be brushed aside and that gorse bushes may have a more solid background than a light hurdle. And in case of forgetfulness, the lesson may with advantage be repeated on any future and desirable occasion. Well, with the first breath of frost I summoned all hands from the warm shelter of the cuddy—or, rather, from the saddle-room fire—to spread stable litter to the depth of a few inches over the ground that forms the circus. By this means I beat Jack Frost by a short head.

The Ring has remained in working order throughout this spell of cold, and the youngsters have been able to canter daily round with every advantage to themselves and to me. The seizure of the opportunity has been all the more useful, because however good any such system and theory of instruction may be, it is often most difficult to carry out fully in practice, while the weather is open and a stern sense of duty is compelling the horsemaster to follow hounds five or six days a week. To stop at home because the animal to be ridden has not yet completed the course of study meant to fit him for the position of a hunter is far too much like abstaining from entering the water till you can swim, and is altogether inadmissible under the conditions of a short life and a due fondness for hounds. So Ignorance has often to be brought out before his time, to take the place of Bliss, as best he may. Thus, too, he may learn quickly enough—if a kind Providence will but protect his legs and his rider's collar-bone during his first display of artless and clumsy helplessness. I am a great believer in the efficacy

of kindling the spirit of a young horse by giving him a share in the enjoyment of the hunting-field—sending him, however, always back to his stable before he has become surfeited or wearied. He then learns to look upon cross-country exercise as a happy pastime. But, again, I am equally of opinion that a hunter can be made more brilliant and perfect by a few finishing lessons at home than by many a rap received and many a difficulty barely overcome in the track of hounds. No horses measure their stride so accurately, change their legs so quickly, or jump their fences so clean, as well-schooled steeplechasers—whether you take them at their own game or apply their talents to the field of foxhunting. And these are all tutored at home—taught to look after and collect themselves, however hurried the pace, and however frowning the barriers. I would imply that to jump the big fences of the grass countries, with ease, flippancy and safety, a horse should have been educated to take care of himself without any stop to look. In other words he should have by a few fast and finishing lessons (and of course the encouragement of a lead) acquired quickness, confidence, and freedom from hesitation that in only solitary instances will come to him by means of the hunting field. He should possess the power and readiness to go fast over his fences; though far be it from me to advocate the desirability of his being at all times allowed to do so, even in the countries of which I am writing. A horse going into his bridle collects *himself*, and is more under his rider's command as to pace and procedure than the cleverest slug that ever measured to an inch how much he is really *obliged* to jump.

FROM WELSH ROAD GORSE WITH THE WARWICKSHIRE.

A DAY'S hunting is often a vivid lifetime of action and thought. But unless it has brought an event of great mark, you sleep it off, and it is done with. Next day, following the same pursuit,

but in a new scene and in fresh company, you might be inhabiting another sphere. Yesterday's existence has gone up to the clouds—and calls for a moment's thought to bring it down again. Yes, personally, I enjoy raking out the half-burnt ashes and warming myself over their recovered glow. Who knows, or how soon, when the brightness may be dead, and the warmth all wanting?

'Tis Wednesday night. Let me study the heaven, and the signs. A clear sky, a southerly wind—and an optimist groom pronouncing, after the manner of his kind, "'osses all well." He rightly deems that there can be no calling him to account before Sunday—when we shall pick out and present him with more thorns than he ever dreamed of for stable perquisites, and discover for him possibly more passing injuries than he has bandages to treat. (But then the *fidus Achates* of a writer is but as a relative or intimate of an angry M.F.H., an exponent subject, a whipping block, to "point a moral and adorn a tale," and is certainly no worse than his fellows, except in print.)

Thursday evening, Feb. 3.—What did you do at Dunchurch? Let me tell you what we did from Shuckburgh, as far as time will admit—a proviso that must always accompany an account of a Thursday run. The two Warwickshires to-day met within a few miles of each other—on their respective sides of the beautiful Vale. The morning embodied a wild, warm gale, and brought nothing but confusion and discomfort. To hear was impossible, to see was difficult, to retain your beaver a feat of balance and sleight-of-hand combined. At two o'clock Lord Willoughby de Broke took his hounds on to the Welsh Road Gorse near Ladbroke (from which we last year saw so sharp a run)—and half the company went home. "No scent; save your horse for another day!"—and so, my gay and noble adviser, you lost the most brilliant run of the season!

2.30 P.M.—The gale, now somewhat moderated, blowing towards Shuckburgh, but a rare stout fox, with a point in view and a heart within him, away up the breeze. Forty or fifty

men had remained to see the draw and see him go—and a truly wonderful proportion of these completed the gallop. As a comparative stranger, I can make not even an approximate list. But of what and whom I saw I will tell—as far as acquaintance will carry me and a breathless struggle has left its memory. Up the wind, then, and down the road—that black dog “making the run” by his drive and nose, and turning to a yard where his quarry had left the gravel. Out of the road at this spot some twenty men followed their proper leader, the Master, then spread out to gallop and to jump. In a mile or so hounds bent leftward up a thin hillside plantation, then, crossing the ridge, raced on for a due southerly course. Three oak rails refused to bend or break, and a crack and a roar (I trust it was only of alarm, not injury) turned half the gathering phalanx to a less crucial difficulty some fifty yards below—where hedgecutters had just lowered the black staring bullfinch. But the lead of huntsman and whip was well established over the enormous pasture which hounds had already half covered—Mr. Craven (*file*), however, being also very visible in the van. Two gates which formed a cart track took his lordship and Mr. Bunbury parallel with the pack, yet half a field to their right; and this palpable route also had the advantage of bridging a deep ugly brook. Capt. Mildmay, however, must have tackled this successfully on the far left—for now he seemed suddenly to have dropped from the clouds, holding a clear, close, lead for several minutes.

A deep, hidden brook next lay on the path—but hindered not half so much as did those three baleful ploughs that took up the final five minutes of the first slashing twenty, and that stole the steel out of many a hunter whose pedigree owned any taint of such soil. By a farm building came a second pause—not a fair breather, alas—then forward as fast as before—and the first fence a very chasm—an honest twelve or fourteen feet brook, with a fortunate stake-and-bound before it. All scrambled, but few fell—though the loud clatter on the left bade the most self-engrossed glance hastily round. The cause

was as obvious as the disaster was pronounced. An oxrail on the farther bank had been invisible through the taller hedge—and a good man had gone down. The grass now rode bitterly deep; the pace was tremendous as ever—and hounds led their field well to the Oxford Canal, Messrs. Onslow (10th Hussars) and Bunbury, with Lord Willoughby, cutting out all the work on the right, Mr. Hanbury doing the same office on the left—and so we rose to the road leading into Prior's Hardwick (now a quarter of a mile away), where perhaps a dozen or more men gathered while hounds feathered for another brief moment. (When I have mentioned Sir F. Winnington, Major Long, Mr. Rhodes, Mr. Leon, Mr. Watson, I think I have enumerated the few I was in a position to recognize—though I have a prominent recollection of two other blackcoats in the prime of youth and tailoring, and again of a brown and well serviced hat, and again of a covert coat beneath a face I ought to know. But let me, prithee, be forgiven.) Nor can I say exactly how we came, except that it was in a very straight line to the village of Priors Marston—thirty-five minutes to here, as good as shall be seen this season—pace wonderful and country superb. That if we did not pass actually near the covert of Watergall we at least crossed its well-known brook, I'll swear, for I recognized the glint of its water while just escaping the bath of a previous year. Now my story must quickly close. Hounds could only pick out the line over light plough to Hellidon, after their fox had threaded the village last named, but at length they worked it into the covert of Dane Hole. Here he was—right enough—but in company with a brace of others. The difficulty of keeping to the true line seemed insuperable—when there were no less than three going forward above Catesby. Yet, though there was no possibility as yet of verifying the subject of pursuit as being still the great weary fox that had left Dane Hole—it seems they never changed. For, though the chase was given up at 4.30, about a mile from Staverton village, in consequence of the probable confusion of foxes, the beaten fox (as I learned on my homeward way) had barely strength to creep

into a stackyard at that place. Yet 'twas a grand good run—such as we are treated to but few times in a winter, even in the grass countries.

SAINT VALENTINE.

OF the six days for work and play, Monday has everywhere the most peremptory claim upon hunting men. No one will miss a Monday if he can help it, let the country be what it will, let the weather be what it may—and there is more zest, more keenness, perceptible on the first out-day of the week, than on any chosen occasion of later day. The giants refreshed come forth with vigour and ambition that settle down rather than intensify under fatigue and routine. But, given a choice Grafton meet, and an atmosphere as cool, bright, and exhilarating as a decent sample of '74—no wonder the opportunity is gladly and gaily seized by a very host. I fear no contradiction when I speak of the Grafton lady-pack as offering a pattern almost incomparable—in work, beauty, and uniformity. And, hunted as they are, they exhibit the faculty of accounting for their foxes to a degree that is truly admirable. Quick, handy, lathy and brilliant, they drive and hunt, charm the eye and teach a lesson. These ladies were at Little Preston on Saint Valentine's Day of the present year, when the sun shone bright, the wind blew cold, the turf was hard and dry, and the plough rough and dusty: and they ran a brace of foxes down—killing one and leaving another underground. In more correct order, the latter first. He was found at Ganderton—the which is a small hollow wood between Preston and Canons Ashby, the three places marking a circle now followed and traversed for an hour and a half. We all jumped a fence in a desperate hurry at starting—and, for the rest, we needed not, ought not, to have thrown a leap again. A very road-running fox, in truth—and, even if this road-running brought out the powers of the pack to the utmost, the addition of some variety in the ride beyond the labour of adaptation and the misapplication of whip-handles to gate-latches would not have been altogether

inacceptable, where so much of the ground was green, and the scent generally good enough to insist a gallop. That a jump was now and then to be found if sought, I am ready to admit—and indeed can illustrate, taking A. and B. once more as my factors in the problem to be demonstrated. A. was by no means ambitious, but he didn't know the country as intimately as he may at some possible future period, if times go well. B. didn't know it either, but was amiably willing to make its acquaintance in such fashion as might be represented as desirable and befitting. Hounds crossed a lane; crowd branched right and left for proper outlet; A.'s gaze pursued the disappearing pack, and his heart was fain to do the same. But A.'s veteran steed, on whose well-fed ribs the conscience-marks of many a previous shortcoming are, like the violets of spring, just sprouting in deep contrast to their groundwork, set his face



resolutely against quitting good company. And A. and his recalcitrant beast were left for a while alone, in mute but bitter contest, till an evil fate brought B. trotting innocently up the lane. The words "Give me a lead out, sir!" with which A.

summoned him to assist, partook fully as much of the assumption of command as they did of entreaty—for time forbade ceremony, and A. was already well nigh to wrath with himself and all surroundings. Anyhow, B. gave unhesitating compliance. The ditch was broad and blind, the binders lay strong above a lofty bank, and a goodly drop led into the field beyond. Into this field B. and his horse pursued headlong their different ways. A. followed gleefully, but, alas, with the consciousness of a debt incurred—and found himself involved in a ten minutes' ride in pursuit of his pilot's clumsy hunter; while the gay throng that he would have headed faded gradually from his longing sight. Begone ambition. Begone gratitude. Make your moral, and swing your gates. I have no long story for Monday. A warm sun, a capital scent, and a fox that loved a circle and might well have learned his country on a pony. These made the young day.

The first point to note in the next Pytchley Wednesday is that we hunted at all. The ground was deemed possible for hounds about 11.30, but pronounced by one and all who were sunning themselves at Misterton to be absolutely unfit for riding, positively dangerous for jumping. How consistently they acted upon the unanimous dictum, I will briefly show. Fifty—nay, a hundred—went with hounds for a forty minutes' ride from Misterton Gorse long before the hot sun had in any degree ironed out the stiffened turf. And later on, not a hundred, but as many as were quick enough, scurried from the same good covert to Stanford Hall for as sharp a little burst as has decked the calendar of this chequered season. Of course it was *not* fit to ride or to jump. But hounds went so fast that the fact passed out of recognition for the pleasant time being—and I fancy few people or horses suffered for the temporary forgetfulness. The first fox, then, led them what I may term the usual line of the present season—a ring by Swinford village rightward to Shawell Wood. Hounds went more than a fair pace most of the way—while we kept to the roads with determined persistency for a mile, then found we couldn't, so rode resignedly over such gaps as came in the line. I don't

like frosty ground, and am not ashamed to own it. But this chanced to be a day of gruesome peril to the emissary of "the Field, the Farm, and the Garden" in fair Northamptonshire. And the least of these perils was occasioned by the frost. Whence came the others, then? Why, from the porter, the pig, and the sheep—and in degree according to the order named. Let all this of course be included in a single parenthesis, only to instance how dangerous, even to the most careful and over experienced, is the wild pursuit of the fox.

To begin with, the railway porter pushed his timid hunter, with its possibly more timid freight, backward during the process of mounting—till the pair were involved in a struggle for very existence, on the metal-edge of a deep wagon-cutting. The pig raced him up the straight of the second field from the gorse, and with a wild grunt charged his left front—causing a sudden check that might well have dislodged a man of ordinate

length of leg. A wicked sheep left the scudding flock, and the good quad. cleared twenty feet of fearful space to leave the beast untouched. Truly I am glad to be working pen and cigar in the peaceful security of the "home-ranche." Yes, I bested my sheep—though an old and valued friend fared worse

with his. His baa-lamb made his cast in the centre of one of these big pastures while the huntsman was making *his* round its outskirts. Merryman is not only a foxhunter, but, after the manner of all in this happy country, very fond of the farmers. So Merryman snatched the opportunity to turn shepherd, and rode valiantly and good-naturedly to the rescue. But the sheep kicked horribly—and, moreover, looked dangerously like biting. Merryman's horse had a far more vivid sense of the danger of the situation than his master; and at ten yards distance testified it with forelegs outstretched and nostrils dilated. From each point of the compass Merryman tried it in vain. Moments were passing. Toot-toot—away, away. "Hey, you fellows, look after that sheep!"—and there were plenty of ready sheep-lifters, for the soil wasn't safe for a ride this day.

Where was I, when the first stroke of this parenthesis was struck? We had reached Shawell Wood, and went on. But, in spite of two as clever moves as ever recovered a line, scent failed after Cotesbach; and the fox scored.

Next the bursting of a fox and the handling of him in twenty and odd minutes. Misterton Gorse a second time. A long waiting, and then the usual rush (let me add, not a soul had stayed at home because the lawn was frost-hardened). And we blundered all of a heap (good English, please, requires a leisurely pen) on to the long plantation—two fields, by the course, from the covert. In to scratch and out to thorn, if you wished; or, better, by way of double handgate, through the same belted thicket, a hundred yards back. Hounds soon hung a few seconds over plough that was dusty, and discreditable to February. Then they raced over the old proper pastures to Stanford Hall. If anybody pressed them now, let him enter his mount forthwith for the Hunt Cup of Rugby, March 8th. Fifteen minutes brought hounds up to their fox at the Icehouse Spinney. In seven minutes more they were heaped in a scrambling mass. Brief it had been; but "the right sort" for a grass country, while it lasted.

MARCH MOMENTS.

NORTH KILWORTH on Wednesday, March 9, showed what a Pytchley field could be—in the final spring month, and on the day following the Rugby Chases. I dare not call upon my meagre descriptive powers to attempt any picture of the surging mass that spread out over the country when fox and hounds went away from Kilworth Sticks. Perhaps half the crowd belonged to Northamptonshire; the others came from anywhere, everywhere—and a few were very alarming on their strange mounts, and in their strange fashion of treating a packed gateway as though it were a scrimmage at football. During the greater part of the day there was fortunately not even scent enough to allow of their riding over hounds—the latter being absolutely helpless. Then, after witnessing a close-running fox well hunted to death round the hills of Hemplow, more than half of them went home.

But no cross-country scurry could well be brighter, while it lasted at its best, than the evening gallop of to-day from Elkington (Lord Spencer's) Covert. A strong remnant of the hundreds of the morning (all hope of a run long ago dismissed from their minds) stood by while a brace of foxes broke covert across the grassy hills on the Cold Ashby side. They holloed the one that turned for Hemplow, but the little ladies coursed the other to Elkington Bottom (half a mile's distance). To gallop in and out of these steep gulleys is like a memory of Exmoor, or of the green tops of the Neilgherries. The quickest and truest of pilots in such and similar case is one of our ex-Masters,* to whom Badby Wood is never a labyrinth and Nobottle never a difficulty. His lead showed a ready outlet in a bridle-path handgate, from the dell to the open country. *Such* a change now from all that had belonged to morning and midday! Hounds driving and straining—the quickest from covert still in front, every one of the others racing to reach the

* Mr. J. A. Craven.

head. Fences in front at which man need turn not a yard, as he issued from the glen and hurried to ride. And I fancy, from what I could see of the fray, that the order of battle depended much upon precedence at that little gateway. Two earlier stake-and-bounds were good and fair along their whole face. Then came an oxer in a corner—whose rail told a noisy tale, as second man or third man made it good, for us who followed and were thankful. Sharp to the left through a tall stalwart bullfinch, the big horses of Mr. Muntz and Mr. Jameson making the daylight comfortably visible. Hounds still holding a little the best of it—and the pasture a full quarter of a mile across. Under a tree was the only place, and a drop into a lane a next necessity—while for the first time the leading horsemen fairly came up to hounds. I am not good at mapping a run as I ride—but from long habit I seldom, if ever, forget a fence that has once caught my nervous eye. As we plunged into this road and rose out of it, it struck me we were crossing the track that leads from Cold Ashby to Winwick village. At all events we left Winwick Warren on our left hand, and crossed the strong valley to West Haddon village—half-way to which a deep little watercourse, with heavy blackthorn binders laid on the farther bank, came in the course. The two leaders crashed into its strength; Mr. Onslow and Mr. Schwabe flipped over in their wake; Mr. Atherton met with the temporary delay that must necessarily accompany a double summersault, however deftly rendered; Mr. Logan, Mr. Greig, Mr. Adamthwaite, and Mr. Pender were very much in the front rank; and twenty men—ay, and fair women among them, as is usual here—were all together when a chance came to unfob the watch.

A moment's check after this ten minutes' struggle was succeeded by a good gallop forward, which fifty or sixty of us could see and enjoy. A fine grass country still, wherein several smaller ox-fences had to be doubled by the ready troop—then leftward till the house of Mr. H. Atterbury (who, too, was riding prominently in the run) was passed in view. And at the same moment, not a hundred yards before hounds, Reynard

himself also turned into view. But, dodging through a gateway, he just evaded the gaze of the busy pack, and, as bad luck would have it, next moment he was on dry arable and among flying sheep. Half an hour to this—and he had seemed almost in their mouths. They hunted him on under utmost difficulties till the hour was completed, Guilsborough was nearly reached, and Cottesbrook was shadowed forth across the valley. But thus he saved himself; though the huntsman would not be likely to leave a beaten fox in a free country, while a ray of hope and daylight remained.

And truly, when the turf is in such order that a good horse goes upon springs, and when a scent is vouchsafed in dusty March, a burst over the green Midlands is a little gift from Paradise.

WEEDON BARRACKS THE CENTRE.

THIS dry sunny spring has at least been a boon to the very best class of our suffering fellow mortals, the farmers. Never, I am told, have they known so apt, and workable, an early spring: and now, if ever they are to experience a turn of the tide, the “good fellows who live by the land” should see the way to getting their own again. I came across a scrap somewhere the other day, the truth of which is widely applicable, but in no case more seriously than when the struggle for existence is “on the top of the ground,” A.D. 1887 and thereabouts:

'Tis a very good world, sirs, we live in,
To spend and to lend and to give in;
But to earn and to hold, or to get a man's own,
'Tis the very worst world, sirs, that ever was known.

Going to covert was the quickest and the least cheerless part of Friday. If you don't start late and travel consequently in feverish anxiety, which on the strength of various fair trials I am bound to consider the common condition of those who hack upon wheels, driving is “good business” in the dry days of

Spring. It happens I had to do eighteen miles across the heart of Pytchleydom on Friday; but even a spring captain could scarcely be happy while spokes rattled and dust flew thus, though voyaging through the undulating loveliness of Kilsby, Buckby, Haddon, and Welford. The sun seemed to shine through a black veil; the dark hedges were in quiet mourning, while birds in high feather and lambs in high jinks proclaimed the land their own. So it was indeed—though I fear the gay rascals sang a different tune on the morrow, when another freak of weather awaited them.

So to Saturday, the 12th. Weedon Barracks with the same pack and a good many of the same people. Rugby came by rail, door to door. And the soldiers insisted that all should consider "the sun to be over the yardarm." The only men, by the way, who can honestly and solidly claim proficiency at a hunt-breakfast, even at noon, are the robust, healthy, and true sportsmen above-mentioned "who lose by the land" but who stick to it and are round the farm before the bugle has sounded for guard mounting or the landlord has slept off his last cigar (if in these pauper times he can afford himself *flor fina cabagio* at all). The appetite of work and the thirst of late research were alike readily ministered to, by the section of Her Majesty's Army that her Jubilee year finds here awaiting its turn of foreign service, and whose creed is to be embodied in the local Standing Orders for all generations, and batteries: "Dine in blue, and ride in red; quaff good liquor and scorn a head."

Snow—yes, *snow*, and two inches of it—had fallen betwixt cockcrow and blind-opening (these dates at any rate involving a margin upon which I defy contradiction—for the Ides of March are at midday, while Foxhunting is a favourite overnight toast and a prolonged topic here). Foxes won't run to snow, it would seem. Dodford Holt, accordingly, had no answer to give. But Mr. Burton had a very determined fox in his tiny gorse above Daventry. Hounds too appeared to like the slippery snow-spread hillside far better than did men and horses (I honestly believe that, if these horses had not been in a still greater funk than ourselves in our "slithering"

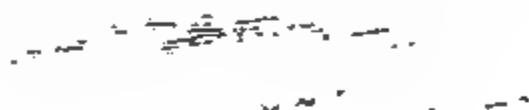
progress down Mount Verdant, they would have gone clean away without power of protest on our part, and one and all of us quaking horsemen have been immolated below on the market-place of Daventry Town. I am assured, however, and dare almost credit it, that horses are really quite as timorous and quite as self-careful as we—(though so many of us do wear spurs of masterful length and sharpness, even if we hold them studiously forward that the only bloodmark shall be afore the saddle). The fox we now followed went direct for Welton Place, touching the town of Daventry (now intent on aspiring, with its nearly-completed railroad, to the dignity of a second Melton); then took the brink of the reservoir and was run hard—till lost.

Tuesday, March 15th, 1887, brought about a difference between expectation and result almost as marked as on a certain day in 1605—when Catesby and his following were to have made “The Bloody Hunt at Dunchurch” the celebration of a Parliament blown into the Thames and a dynasty destroyed. Frost did for us what treachery did for them. Our plot collapsed, and the gathering fell flat. A few assembled; the majority stayed away; and the former only arrived to celebrate a failure.

FROM BRAUNSTON GORSE AT LAST—A TALE OF THE BROOK.

THE long-deferred gallop from Braunston Gorse came off on Saturday, March 26th—to the delight of the “customers” and a full demonstration of the charms of its vale. Between Shuckburgh Hill of the Warwickshire and the above-named *angulus ridens* of the Pytchley, runs, in deep muddy narrowness, a little stream soon afterwards expanding into the almost unjumpable Leame. And, believe me, the green valley that it drains is in every sense typical of the cream of the Midlands—not so flat as Crick-and-Hilmorton, not so hilly as Skeffington, not so simple as Misterton, yet not so stupendous as Oxendon. The brook

itself is easy here, formidable there, impossible at a third place—as you may happen to hit it, and, still more, as your mount faces width or you fancy water. But, nearly everywhere, the



one bank levels with the other; a bold horse need never be trapped; and the mere stride of your gallop will land you, *if* only—ah, there is the word that has wrecked every plan, annulled every project, and spoiled every plot since the sun first shone upon failures. And the mud of the Braunston Brook was stirring with *ifs* well nigh the whole of Saturday's afternoon. The water made the feature, nay, the whole physiognomy, of this foxchase and landscape—as I will endeavour to sketch. Need I touch on the weather, the ground, the covert, the hounds, the horses, and the people? A line is enough, in epitome—the day warm, cloudy, and breezy; the earth, with its velvet coverlid, in perhaps better form for hunting than it has been during the season that is now fast vanishing; the covert a perfect nest of thorn, privet, and what not; hounds the Pytchley bitch pack, wiry, varmint and sharp; horses ugly in their motley spring colouring, but in a hundred instances striking in their lean shapeliness; the people—now I am “baffled and beat.” He who would venture to lay hands on one name should be prepared to complete his list with a whole

catalogue. And, alas, I keep neither a notebook nor a memory. But here at haphazard, let me throw you a few sample names that at least will convey some guarantee that the faculty of crossing a country was not without its representatives—the Master and Mr. F. Langham, Lord Spencer, Lord Rathdonnell, Captains Soames, Riddell, Beach, Majors Long and Riddell, Messrs. Craven, Foster, Henley, Schwabe, Wroughton, Muntz, Wedge, Graham, Sawbridge, Atherton, Greig, Graham, Horne, Dale, Osborne, Fabling, Goodman, &c., &c., and several of the straight-riding ladies of the Pytchley Hunt.

There was music in the scream of the galloping whip as it cut across the breeze from his post beneath the covert—for did it not come from the Shuckburgh direction, and did we not fend off all the baser background of rough hilly upland? The merriest moment of life—a start with foxhounds over a ravishing country—had come again. If any man can think of his woes, his debts, his lost opportunities, lost love, or loves, his bitter to-morrow or his regrettable past—surely he had better withdraw at once from the miserable imposture, confess that his heart is not in the sport, and cling only to late drink and early smoke. The thin chain of white black and tan was already shooting forth from the tangled covert, and glancing over the ant-hilly pasture, swift as minnows across the shallows (an obvious simile in the face of watery trial to come)—ere we had spun down the slope and burst three abreast through the gateway in the hollow. Ridge-and-furrow and ant-hill for forty acres, “all on”—hounds and men—heads straight for the distant hill, no stop nor even a jostle at two low-laid fences, then a dart for the bottom, and water on every man’s brain. Where a cross fence runs down to the brook, the rush divided. Right division found the smoother sailing and the brook charmingly amenable. Left were locked in—though only for a brief, anxious, half second—for the thin end of the wedge, in its everyday practical and determined fashion, split the heavy bullfinch, and made light of the water where it ran in a crude and ugly bed. First follower rolled heavily on the further bank, second went down into the depths. Fifty yards up stream it

was far more savoury to the delicate nostrils of the too sensitive hunter of the Shires, and was accepted, if not with ravenous appetite, at least with less show of nausea.

As I ride the prairie in summer (an occupation quite as conducive to complete abstraction of thought as tramping the pavement of Pall Mall in August), I shall often leaven the dulness of solitude by turning over my mental scrap-book at the pages relating to Braunston Brook. See now—for the life of me I could not tell you who, nor would if I could—but I can still hear the hearty voice of some familiar comrade in the game. “All right, old fellow, I’ll give you a lead!” So he did, but the angle of ejection was wrong—he went up-stream instead of across—and he wore such a nice new pink. Another (he in black) accepting the lead with gladness close and prompt—went upstream too! “And the first lion thought the next a bore.” He said so too, and very loudly. There I left them, roaring lustily, almost in each other’s arms, for “Two’s company, three is none.” Would you have had me spoil the party? Flimsy report tells me that one dead lion was still in his place when the chase drove back by the spot half an hour later. Was it, I wonder, brought about by the wondrous kindness of fellow-feeling that, while warming my chilled limbs at this evening’s fire, my eye should have been caught by this notice in the county paper; “A. P. Licensed Horse Slaughterer. Dead and worn-out horses and other animals fetched away on the shortest notice. All transactions cash. Best price given of any man in the Midland Counties. Telegrams paid for.” Herein is to be found the hope that in some small degree we may yet be enabled to lighten the crushing expense of the Sport of Kings.

But this was only the play of The Brook in its first act. Acts II., III., and IV. were yet in store. Fifty men were over the streamlet now, on the fly; fifty more, nearly as speedily, by a bridge; and hounds were running gloriously over the wide sound slope below Flecknoe. I wondered (the *ego* must continue for narrative’s sake) why a strong and forward section should bend suddenly in their course, and dart leftward for the low ground again. Hounds were bearing again towards

the water—and another bridge was there. Oh, but I would not have gone by that bridge, if you would frank me to the most rollicking comedy of the year. Nobody saw it but I, sweet sir ; and on my honour I will ne'er betray you—for are you not one of the boldest and best that ever schooled a nag on his own farm ? And I ought not to have seen it, but that I, too, was “delayed on business.” Two, three, four, “six of ’em took it in their stride”—and close in their wake came the speediest and most determined of all.

Look that your bridle be wight, my lord,
And your horse go swift as ship at sea :
Look that your spurres be bright and sharp,
That you may prick her while she'll away.

And had not his bridle been wight, and strong as leather should be, I ween that it never had stood the strain or the master escaped a wetting—when thirteen stone seven hung down the bank at one end, and the sorrel, with outstretched legs and down-turned head, held back at the other. A horseman, too, far above the common. But the impetus was *awful*.

So far, so good ; and still we did not leave the brookside. Fox and hounds were pointing for Staverton, when the former encountered two men at work, and the chase forthwith crossed our front with a swing to the right. In the hurry and turmoil it was difficult to see why such a plain-looking oxer as now lay between men and hounds should be beyond a fair hunter's compass. But the width of a Northamptonshire ditch is a varied and often illusory quantity, especially when it chances to mark the line of a valley. I don't fancy any one struck the oxer ; but I am open to correction if any one covered the ditch—though three experimentalists in a row were seen busily sorting hat-strings and bridle-reins after a simultaneous essay. Lower to the right, or higher to the left, the fence was moderate enough : and gladly, by the way, I noticed that a horrid strand of barbed wire had been lowered since a fox was first hunted this way in the early autumn. Else had a fearful catch most certainly have been made to-day.

Fast they ran, now along the valley for perhaps another mile,

THE MIRABABLE MUD-STREAM WAS FULL AS A WASH-FIT AT SHEEP-SHEARING.

[p. 22]

hounds favoured by the recent turn, and almost within view of their fox, when, for the third time, they spun over the brook. A shaking fall is no fitting preparation for horse or man when water, however insignificant, has to be encountered. This was but a meagre rivulet, scarce a horse's length across. But two couple of the blown ones scotched and plunged in (Oh, "I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance,") and the example was immediately followed by another, and yet others—till the miserable mud-stream was full as a wash-pit at sheep-shearing. The Hunt, meanwhile, left these "waders in the surf, waist deep in meadow sweet," and careered forward for Shuckburgh. Why this fox failed to reach such haven is a matter of speculation, if not of indifference. Nay, it was much better that he should *not* have gained the hill and its open earths; for, turning short within two fields of it, he had only to retrace his steps and give his followers much the same cheerful quarter hour back. So they leaped the now pigmy stream a fourth time, on this occasion much nearer to Staverton, and galloped the south side of the valley on the return journey to Braunston Gorse. Hereabouts they had the bad luck to change from a thoroughly beaten fox to a fresh one. Scent altered at once; and they could scarcely follow the line to Bragborough. But those bustling thirty minutes had surely been as replete with fun as any half-hour in this most moderate season. And now I will put many of my comrades, and myself, to very shame. A ten-summer boy rode forth to-day on a shaggy yellow pony—and the latter will complete his third year only when the paddock in which he runs ungroomed has arrived at what is known as "this grass." His father's spurs he had girded on—big steel prongs that might serve a mahout, or do duty on off days for toasting forks. In addition, he wielded a short ash plant, and was actuated by an instinctive and indigenous love of the sport. Armed with these, he followed the hunt throughout—and actually *jumped the Braunston Brook three times!* His name is Allen, and his place of birth and residence is Weedon—where you can easily verify the above improbable, but absolutely correct, statement.

THE WILD STAG ON EXMOOR.

AN opening day of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds must by no means be taken as affording a type of their sport, or fashion of hunting. Stag hunting this Tuesday was merely the excuse; and a noble sport had to submit to being misappropriated for the occasion. The opening meet at Cloutsham is a yearly Carnival, and a Carnival with many of its grotesque accompaniments and clownish attributes—stag hunting acting in about the same relation to the jubilee as horseracing to the Romish festa. Judge from this advertisement, with which the little town of Minehead has for ten days past been placarded by an enterprising tradesman.

A PLEASANT PICNIC.

THE DEVON AND SOMERSET STAGHOUNDS.

The First Meet will take place at Cloutsham on Tuesday, Aug. 13th.

CONVENIENT DELICACIES

may be obtained at —.

Sparkling Wines from 2s. 1d.

And from all appearances the convenient delicacies and the champagne at two-and-a-penny found no little favour.

From 8 A.M. carts and carriages, brakes and omnibuses, waggonettes and pony traps, passed the Feathers Hotel, laden skyhigh with hampers. By eleven o'clock the town was deserted, while each road converging to Cloutsham was choked with vehicles and horsemen, hurrying in from every corner of North Devon and West Somerset. It is asserted that neither in Taunton, Dulverton, Minehead, Porlock, nor Linton did there remain a wheel that would go round or a leg that could move under a saddle: and the scene at the meet lent probability to the assertion.

Cloutsham, to the eye of the stranger, appeared to be but a farmhouse surmounting a spur of the main hills, about four miles directly south of Porlock Bay. One more mile to the south stands Dunkery Beacon, nearly 1700 feet above the sea, and a landmark always strongly impressed upon a new comer, as the centre point round which his geography may by degrees extend itself. Green, and on this occasion crowded, lanes take you to the foot of the hills; and a short but terribly steep ascent lands your panting steed at the top. Lord Lovelace's shooting box (or rather the drive to it, cut through a deep dark wood) is pointed out to you half-way up the incline; and your informant next adds to your stock of knowledge the dictum that the great primeval woods of Cloutsham are the property of Sir Thomas Acland—also that these coverts and the equally dense and still more extensive ones of Culbone lining the sea to the west of Porlock are the mainstay of staghunting in this district.

A lovely spot for a PICNIC truly! The purple-topped hills speckled and varied with gold, where the bloom of the gorse trencched here and there upon the smooth surface of the heather; oak woods of darkest green filling the depths of the precipitous combe at your feet; in the farther valley rich cornfields ready for the sickle, mapped out in broad inky lines by stone banked hedges: beyond these the solitary height of

North Hill (the same rosy colouring on its brow, the same sombre verdancy on its wooded side) marking the sea line from Minehead to Horsedown Point; while through the gap smiled Porlock Bay, "calm and still," as the master pen of romance and sport described it, "like the eyes of a girl, whose being has never yet been stirred into passion by the storm." It was too beautiful a scene for such a motley carousal, such a break-out of Cockneydom; still worse that such sacrilege should be committed under the assumed shadow of a grand and genuine sport. Repugnant it must be to all true sportsmen (and this is a country where in unusual number they are the natural outcome of the soil); and repugnant it undoubtedly is, if form of expression and epithet go for anything. But the Master knows he has to undergo it every year; so submits to the inevitable, and accepts it with the equanimity with which Masters of Hounds have to fortify themselves against trials more numerous and galling than the world at large would imagine. For the others, they stay away on this opening day, or else attend under protest. They do not expect sport under such circumstances, and in this they are seldom disappointed; it is only fair to add that they do their best to forestall any such miscarriage of hope on the part of the visitor.

"Go on Friday" they say "to Hawkcombe Head, and next week to Winsford and the open common, and you may come in for a gallop over Exmoor that will give you a fairer notion of our sport. To-day you will only see a number of people eating and drinking more than is good for them; and if a stag is hunted at all 'tis more than we expect." Indeed, anything less suggestive of the chase it would be impossible to conceive. A grass field next the farmhouse was like a square cut out of Epsom Downs on Derby Day—packed close with carriages, the air alive with champagne corks, and the ground already littered with bottles and the *débris* of luncheons innumerable. On the edge of the coombe each tree had its group of merry-makers intent upon their luncheon-hampers, while horsemen passed from party to party feasting as they went, and noise and mirth

grew rapidly. All round the deep glen, whose fish-hook outline could not have been less than half a dozen miles, were dotted little parties, some in hopes of being near the spot where the deer should break, but most of them intent upon enjoying their picnic apart from the crowd.

Meantime the body of the hounds were shut up in the farm stables, whilst Arthur, the huntsman, and George, his whip, worked the covert with four or five couple of trusted "tufters." For those whose experience of hunting the wild stag, as here carried out, is even less than that of your humble servant, it should be explained that these tufters are not, as might be imagined, anything distinct from the other hounds employed. They are merely staunch and steady members of the pack, experienced in drawing for their game and obedient to voice and horn. Their business is to drive the deer from covert, to submit to being stopped when reaching the open—when, should the quarry be a hind, they are taken back to draw again; should he be deemed a huntable stag they are kept back till the rest of the pack are brought, and laid on to the line. It will be remembered that towards the end of last season Mr. Bisset had the great misfortune to lose half his kennel from rabies, brought about, it is said, by the extraordinary foolishness of a countryman, who actually shut up two stray hounds in an outhouse *with a mad dog and a dead sheep*—turning them loose the next morning after a night spent in a triangular duel over the carcase! When the horrid scourge developed itself, all hounds open to the slightest suspicion of infection were at once destroyed; and the remainder having since been kept, each in his separate kennel, without any further symptom of contagion, it is confidently hoped that all danger of infection is now passed. Still, it has not been deemed advisable as yet to incorporate them with the new material, collected from various kennels to meet the deficiency. Naturally these new comers, mostly from foxhound kennels and mostly unentered to anything, are likely to show themselves green to the game (if I may use the expression) till blood has whetted

their appetites and instinct. As for tufters for them, Mr. Bissett would be entirely at a loss, were it not that, at the time of the outbreak, a few couple of working hounds had been sent to a distance, on account of kennel-lameness. Having recovered from this they now take their place as tufters, and nestors, to the novices.

At the hour I am speaking of, these were threading the combe, while Arthur rode the narrow paths winding down and along its steep sides, and led them in their search. As time wore on, an occasional cheer, a note on the horn, or the throwing of a tongue, rose upwards in the gathering mist, and told that game was afoot. Then, to those who were content to watch steadily over the valley, there was given a glimpse of a brown form glancing across an opening in the trees; soon afterwards a second, and, when the tufters had been some two hours at work, a roar from the crowd proclaimed that they *all* could see a deer. On the opposite hill the speckled bodies of three hounds, following close on a darker and bigger animal, were plainly in view, crossing the purple carpeting where it stretched upwards from the wood. This was **THE STAG**, surely! No, the hope was scarcely framed into words or echoed from a thousand well-wined throats, before a horseman was seen to ride down upon the hounds, and turn them back to the horn. The hind was left to go her way in peace, and the multitude relapsed again into its hampers. The sunshine of the morning had now given place to a drizzling mist; which in turn resolved itself into a driving rain. But the assemblage stood its ground manfully, determined on rivalling, or even outdoing the heavens in its steady downpour. There was no thought of moving, though two o'clock came—three o'clock, and eatables were run out—four o'clock, and even their drinkables were beginning to feel the strain.

At length when it seemed as if these followers of Bacchus and Diana must pitch a night camp, a sudden buzz and stir showed that a change was coming. Half-emptied glasses were thrust aside, waterproofs were cast off or buttoned closely up,

and a murmur of expectation culminated in a burst of excitement, as the huntsman issued from the thicket—his horn to his lips, and most of the tufters at his heels. The whip had, by some marvellous perception, found himself in a position to intercept hounds as they left covert on a scent, where a deer (stag, or hind, he did not know) had stolen away behind the farmhouse. The news was quickly in Arthur's hands; and now he was on his way to fetch the pack to the line. All was in a moment bustle, hurry, and anxiety. Hounds dashed noisily out, mad with excitement and long restraint. Horsemen hurried up from every side—their excitement none the weaker that it had been aggravated by other causes rather than long restraint. Up a narrow lane went the exuberant pack. Crowding in its wake came the no less boisterous crowd—freedom of action, and freedom of diction, its peremptory and strongly enforced tenets. Half an hour—perhaps more—had the deer been gone; but lapse of time would appear (from all one hears) to have a bearing upon the scent of a deer on heather altogether inferior to its influence upon that of a fox on plough or grass. Minutes are of no consequence: and a quarter of an hour, more or less, need not be taken into consideration. If the deer is accustomed to take full advantage of this theory, here is possibly the explanation of the enormous length of some of the runs on record.

Mr. Russell (wiry, keen, and almost youthful in his eighty-third year) rode twenty-five miles to Cloutsham, and took back with him Col. Thomson, who had run down from London for a single day of novelty (the which *at least* he must have found) before setting off to his cub hunting in Fifeshire.

At 12.15 the stag had broken covert. At 1 P.M., hounds were laid on the line. Mark this, fellow foxhunters; and frame your conclusions anent the scent of the deer! No carted "hass" this (as the enthusiast of immortal memory termed the half-tamed animal)! no tricks of aniseeded hoof here! But a genuine monarch of the glen—his feet tainted by nothing more artificial than the heather and the fern. And yet, with five-and-forty

minutes interval, a young uneducated pack flung themselves into his track, as if the heather blossom were still quivering from his tread—not as fox-hounds stoop and drive and cry, but silently jumping and snatching at it, as if to pick the scent where it hung high on the flower; stealing forward noiselessly, but no less swiftly and determinedly. Up an open gully they sped, the huntsman and others (chiefly, I fancy, novices, who, like your correspondent, wished to see and learn all they could of the game) riding parallel above them—the old hands getting on to head of the ravine, there to wait their coming. Across the main heath road, through a gateway in the huge banked fence, such as divide these moors into their separate sheep-walks—and now we are embarked on the open forest, nothing but wild common for miles before us. The heather is knee deep, often girth deep; but the ground underneath it as sound as old turf, and horses rake over it with a freedom and safety that the new comer can scarcely credit. But example lends confidence; and soon he learns that he too may gallop, and *must* gallop, if he would see his share of the fun. If his horse be, like him, new to the country, he may likely enough, bound and jump at the waves of heather and fern—but only for a first few strides; the pace is too good for that; and no less quickly than his rider will he be warmed to emulation by the rushing forms alongside.

Hounds are only seen as they bound over the smothering growth, searching and catching at the scent as they leap. No pack could carry a head (as a foxhunter understands the term) over ground so hampered as this; and already the pack is string-out, like a comet in its swift course. That the scent of a deer is, in all its characteristics, entirely different from that of the fox, a single fortnight's experience fully convinces one. As has been noted before, time has comparatively little effect on the former: and hounds can apparently run it as vigorously at the end of an hour as when the stag is just before them. A hot fresh scent of the deer seems to have none of the maddening power of that of the fox—to send them driving and flinging, with every tongue loosened and every hound striving for the

lead. The track of the stag is acknowledged tacitly and willingly, not exuberantly. The leaders settle at once into their place, and the rest follow on. There is no noise, and scarcely a quiver of the stern—and yet these hounds are all imported (unentered) from kennels where a mute hound is not allowed to live. And this silent, stealthy, impassive style of running (which, in my ignorance, I had considered a peculiarity of the chase of the carted deer—and as, more or less, a consequence of want of blooding) is, I now learnt, quite as much a characteristic of Wild Staghunting—stamping the fact that the scent of the deer and the scent of the fox exert totally different influences on the senses of the hound.

Over hill and valley and stream hounds now ran on, moving ever fast enough to keep horses at a stretching gallop. Still they kept pointing onwards into the bleakest and, in a hunting sense, the best of Exmoor Forest. But, when seventeen rapid minutes had been scored, the rivulet of Chalk Water reached, hounds stood suddenly still—and I can only add (venturing no speculative explanation) that the stag was lost, then and there. With the old hounds such a sudden failure could not have been ; but the puppies and tyros were not to be depended on ; so, after prolonged effort, Arthur had to give up his search—and the day ended in a pelting merciless downpour.

The chase of the red deer on Exmoor is no longer a mere local pursuit ; but from every county pilgrim-sportsmen have journeyed down to settle themselves for a common purpose where their various fancy may dictate. There are no lack of good quarters for them. Some choose Dulverton as a quiet (if sociable) retreat ; others like to be landed at the terminus of Minehead, nor care to take themselves and their horses farther than the "Feathers." Others drive another eight miles to enjoy the ripple of the waves at Porlock Weir ; some like to view the sea dashing on the rocks at Lynmouth ; some prefer the heights of Lynton just above ; while others come by train each hunting morning from Taunton. South Molton has its visitors ; the village of King's Brompton is a central spot that might well be

utilised by a man intent only on staghunting—and the same may be said of Exford, which offers the further inducement of the kennels, neat and pretty as can be seen in England.

In the local mind staghunting is as much a portion of an acknowledged creed as the solemnisation of matrimony, or a belief in the merits of cider. Men are brought up to cherish and revere it: to regard it is a solemn institution—their country's by right of being nature's chosen ground, theirs by a happy accident of birth, which appointed them to so honourable a trust. They speak of it no less earnestly than of the national policy—with the difference, that this earnestness is ever applied in heartfelt support, and no voice is raised to cast a doubt, or to suggest another side to the question. The stag robs no hen-roost; and interferes with no game-bird's nest—save when now and again his lordly step falls by chance on the greyhen seated beneath the heather. But in his own way he makes his presence felt—not always harmlessly. Yet his living is never grudged: his right to the produce of the soil is never questioned. Not a farmer, or a labourer, within the wide radius where the staghounds are seen, but welcomes his broad slot in the turnip field, is proud to think that a warrantable stag has been harboured thence, and that the combe above the homestead will give out royal sport this morning. Every passer-by on the road—yeoman or working-man, country townsman or more rustic shepherd—enquires of the returning sportsman “Did you kill the stag to-day?”; and the news of last spring, that the pack were fallen victims of a destroying malady, came like a dire calamity on Devon and Somerset. Few packs of foxhounds can find their game as readily, and certainly, as these staghounds—whether on Exmoor proper or elsewhere in their wide, and heartily-disposed, territory. A *vulpecide* is everywhere looked upon as a selfish sneak—be he the village poacher, or the lord who with estates in one country takes his pleasure in another, or muffles himself sullenly in his cloak of egotism at home. But the man who lifts his hand, in person or proxy, against a stag in the West is branded at once as a pariah, a leper whose

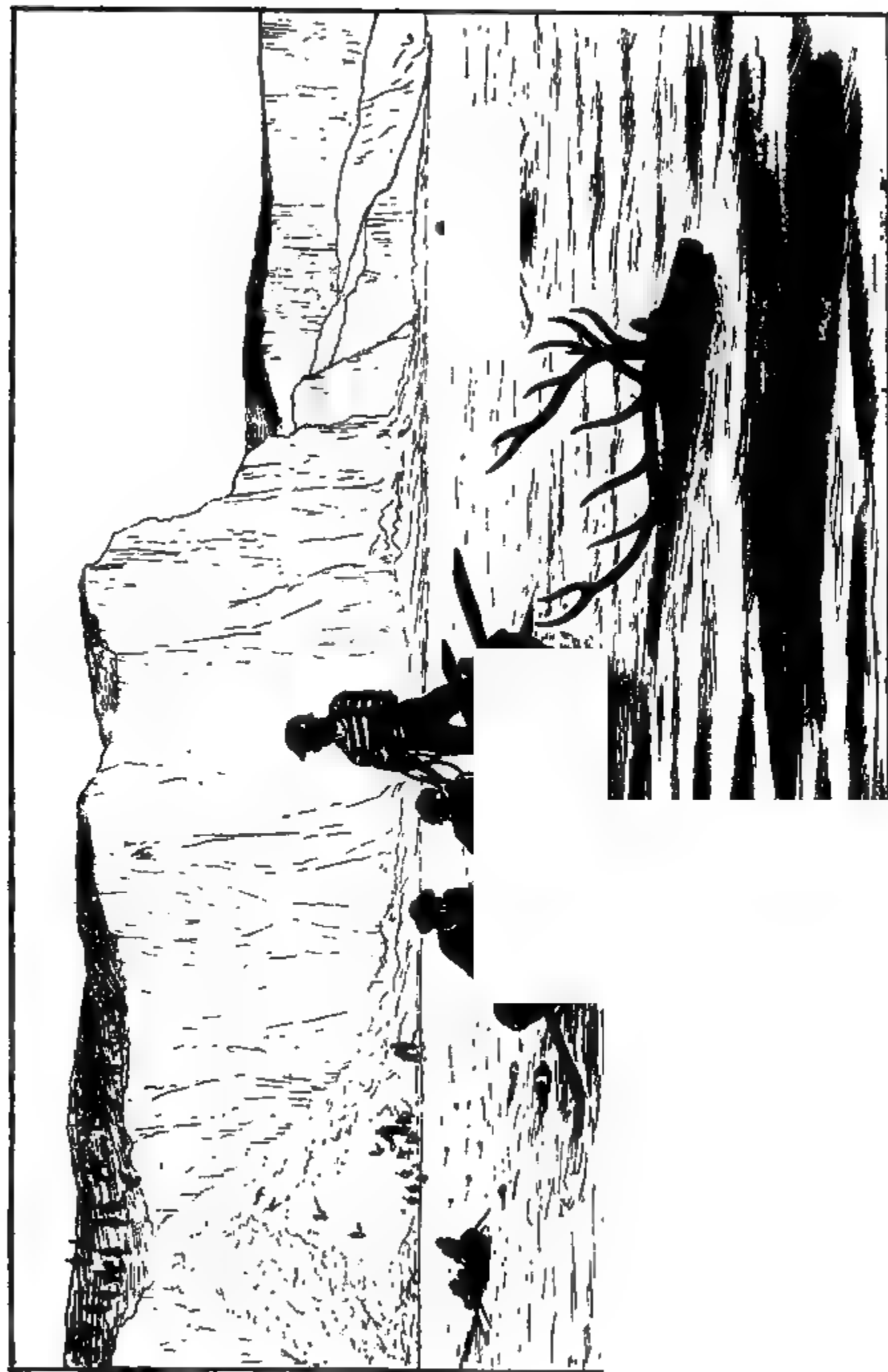
presence cannot be tolerated in the market place or at the dinner table; and he quickly learns that neither in North Devon or West Somerset is there room or greeting for such as him.

A meet of the staghounds on Exmoor has none of the smart appearance and showy concomitants of a meet of foxhounds in a fashionable country. On the contrary, neither in general effect nor in individual detail can it be designated as even neat. The hounds are (especially the remainder of the old pack) exceedingly even, powerful and imposing; the huntsman and whip are well dressed and mounted; and the Master shows in example the attention to completeness of appearance which he insists upon in his establishment. But beyond this, there is a rough and ready, if pleasant and hearty, look about all that meets the eye. Dress is a matter regarded only from the point of utility: leathers are unknown—and with leathers, of course, are avoided the whole structure of vanities, of which those snowy cares are the keystone. A pink coat is to be seen here and there; but (no offence to wearers) so apart are they from the surroundings that they catch the eye little less than would a court dress at a cricket match. No, it is satisfactory to be able to tell fox-hunting friends who may meditate a journey westward, that they may give their valet a holiday; and may safely limit their hunting kit to a billycock hat, an old shooting coat, butcher boots, and a pair or two of coloured cords rather too shabby to give away—and this without finding themselves at all remarkable. They may make up their minds to be drenched to the skin almost daily; and a covert coat is not unuseful for the journey to the meet: but if recent experiences may serve as a guide, I should say that a waterproof is scarcely a desirable extra, in which to ride a run in August. But one can afford to get wet with the thermometer somewhere about 70°; and though there would appear to be always scent enough to follow a deer, rain cannot be by any means detrimental to that very necessary agent.

On Friday, August 29 (Hawkcombe Head).—A stag of great size had been harboured in the wood immediately above Por-

lock Weir (Garner's, if I mistake not); and the tufters were quickly busy, while the field, as usual, mostly congregated on the brow above. Soon a two-year-old hart made his way up from the wood. But *he* was not game enough: the tufters were whipped off, and the search resumed. Likely enough, the youngster had been pushed out, as a substitute, by the cunning veteran who was still hid below. An old stag—with all the experience of several summers, and possessing, as he does, the same keen sense of scent as his followers—will frequently, I am told, drive out every hind in covert, or rouse up a young stag and crouch in his lair (letting hounds pass right over him) rather than run for his life till actually obliged. And thus it is, that the expedient of separating and forcing him out, by means of a few steady tufters has to be resorted to, though he may be harboured in his lair to the very bush.

Almost from the same spot where they were in pursuit before, the tufters were again on a line; and in a few minutes a trusty "tally" from the middle wood proclaimed that this time a warrantable stag was afoot. Pushed along the covert bordering the cliff, he made his appearance outside the wood a mile away, as was telegraphed by watching footpeople. It was impossible to know if he had gone or not; but, crediting him at least with good intention, Arthur spurred for the pack and laid them on to his line. Out upon the moor for thirty minutes' galloping. Down again into the woods they drooped, running hard while, along overhung paths and deep cut lanes, the field struggled in a parallel string close above. Two miles of this work, with little to guide us except the influence of example, and we emerge on to a grassy knoll with the sea almost sheer below. What is that boat, pulling hard after a brown speck in the still water—two other boats racing up at an angle? To the new comer they represent nothing; but *much* to the experienced eyes of the sporting yeoman who have guided us hither. The stag has taken to the sea—little thinking, as he dares his pursuers to a swim, how fatally handicapped is he, nor counting on the fell allies which boat and oar bring to the only enemies he



THE STAG HAS TAKEN TO THE SEA.

knew. Hard indeed to be swooped upon by these sea-vultures, when fighting already an uphill battle against odds. But he will not give in yet. Turning shorewards he strikes out desperately for the breakers, whence are already issuing a dozen couple of gleaming heads—with tongues more noisy now than they were ever heard from heather and wood. Up through the quiet height rises every cry of hound, every cheer of the competing oarsmen, as plain to the groups on the cliff as though 30 feet, not 1300, intervened between the latter and the exciting (not gladdening) scene below. Now he doubles as they near him, heads once more for the sea, and gains two boats' lengths in the unavailing fight. Again the leading boat is on him; again bow rises to fling the noose; and again a quick turn scores against the thrower. The white heads of the hounds dot the sea in the wake of the boats, as all three crews now close for an effort, and from three sides dart upon the hapless beast. It needs not the shouts of the captors to tell they have conquered; nor can one feel a spark of pleasure that so grand an animal has fallen in a manner little befitting his powers or his proper destiny. However, he took the sea, as Reynard goes to ground: and either meets with little sympathy or indulgence, on seeking so mistaken a refuge. Secured by a rope round his horns the stag was hauled ashore. The huntsman proposed to keep him to turn down before the young pack; but it was decided that venison should be his future state—and venison, accordingly, he became (a form of expression which must be allowed to take the place of further detail; for, remember, this was no exciting finish to a long chase, when the softest-hearted of sportsmen is bloodthirsty and unsparing, but a matter of business-like expediency such as appeals not to the amateur). He was a splendid stag of thirteen points—his weight, moreover, being something enormous, and possibly accounting in some degree for the aversion he displayed to facing the open.

THE QUANTOCKS.

THE Quantock hills, by force of custom, yearly demand a couple of days of staghunting, early in the season. Accordingly Mr. Bisset the following week took his new pack from the Exford kennels to his own place, Bagboro', situated at the foot of these hills, on the slopes of which he has considerable coverts. The Quantocks are little more than a lofty isolated ridge some twenty miles eastward of Exmoor Forest and running at right angles to the coast. Heather as rich as is to be found on Brendon or Dunkerry crowns their summit; woods as dense and game-enticing as Culbone or Cloutsham fill their wide combes and clothe their steep sides. But the Quantocks are limited in length and still more limited in breadth. A stag may run their whole extent, and be killed in the sea in half a dozen miles—while the crowd rides along the upper ridge and anticipates his course from point to point. In fact, as said the oldest sportsman of the west (and all who hunt here must know whom I take the liberty of quoting), "A quiet trot along the top will probably show you all the run." It may happen indeed as it did on this Monday, that the deer takes to the vale and the "enclosures" (as the impracticable fields and fences of Somerset are aptly termed); and then your trust must be put in roads and gateways, of which there are happily plenty. And so the Quantocks are not held in high favour by true staghunters as a body, nor, I imagine, by the master in particular. But at least they commend themselves to the notice of the overflowing energy of Taunton, Bridgewater, and their environs; and on the occasion of Quantock Farm being advertised, there is as much stir in the neighbourhood, as when Cloutsham calls out all the picnic populace within reach of Exmoor. So, on horse, foot and in carriage all within twenty miles betake themselves, luncheons, wives, and other belongings, to the summit of the Quantocks—there to feast, to shout, and to make staghunting a right royal sport. The longer the tufting, the better for them; for, if the meet be at 10.45 A.M.,

cannot these worthy citizens ride about till the unaccustomed exercise renders the saddle uncomfortable? Can they then not lunch till two P.M., and toast "staghunting" till three? After this, a race or two along the heath road—in which pleasant sport a most practical instance of the inability of speed, as produced by single horse power, to overcome an inert mass as represented by a gigful of screaming women, come vividly under notice. Then a return to the commissariat department to recruit exhausted nature; and the worthy burgesses are ready for *anything*.

But, over and above the opportunity for the study of human nature under its freest and liveliest aspect, the Quantocks have another compensating virtue, in the shape of scenery wondrously beautiful. Descriptions of scenery at least from an ordinary pen, of necessity read dull and flat—if ever they are read at all. For my part I generally skip them; and I expect my readers to treat me in the same way. But the salient points of the landscape are often necessary to the argument of the play; and, with no regard to scenic effect, must yet be sketched in broad outline. On the topmost ridge, then, there is a double view—east and west. Each picture has the same immediate foreground—knots of horsemen, and men off their horses, round well occupied and well-victualled carriages. The eastern view gives the lovely fertile vale of Bridgewater flanked by the waters of the Channel in the distance—black under lowering rainclouds, nearer in, red as rusty iron with the silting of the hills from the late storms. West and south-west lies the similarly beautiful vale of Taunton—the half-gathered corn crops now wasting under the continued rain, while the square of bright green turnips revel in the invigorating moisture. (Weather cannot suit all his products, or Farmer Giles might be left without his grievance.) The heights of Brendon and the lofty head of Dunkerry to-day were lost in the sooty vapour, that swept across them and hurried over the dark water to join the banks of clouds on the Welsh hills. But the hunting grounds of Hawkcombe, and Cloutsham, and all the

woods fringing the eastern edge of Exmoor were plainly marked under the overhanging blackness—masses of darkest green to connect the varied colouring of the plain with the deep purple that lost itself in the frowning heavens.

The glorious landscapes of Devon and Somerset require no bright sun to show them to advantage. Their own lights and shades are so vividly marked that the aid of sunshine dazzles rather than assists the sight. The dull grey light of a cloudy day does them better justice, preserves all outlines, but softens tints which the glare of the sun will render almost tawdry. The brilliant colouring of the heather, the flashing brightness of the yellow corn, the intense depth of green of the woods, and the mirrorlike surface of the sea, are best brought together under the soothing influence of a dull sky. And in this respect we have this year been continually fortunate. Often the advantage has been bought by the discomfort of a wet skin ; but a wet skin is seldom harmful under exercise ; and the price has not been a heavy one for such pictures of nature as have been daily spread before us.

So the Master goes to the Quantocks to fulfil a duty : the field go there to feast upon the scenery—and upon other more portable luxuries. Scenery, however, is the chief reward of the trip ; and most of the staghunters look forward impatiently to the return of the hounds to Exford. For sport can no more subsist on scenery, than matrimony on love—a point which a man of the world once put in the following forcible way. A. was a younger brother, dependent on the elder orphan B. A. decided that he was in love, would like to get married, and appealed to B. “What are you going to live upon?” said the more practical B. “Oh, I never thought of that!” replied A. “Well, then,” rejoined B. in a style of diction peculiar to himself, “the sooner you think of it the better ! Love’s a blessed good thing, but it won’t find you a bottle of pop when you want one, or a gig horse either ! So don’t let me hear any more of your nonsense !” And accordingly A. is still a bachelor, and still able to drink and drive when he may feel inclined.

The day's doings of Friday last (August 30th), then, were briefly as follows: Nearly the whole of the east side of the Quantocks is covered with a chain of dwarf oak woods. In one of the biggest of these (Ramscombe Wood, I fancy) it was supposed that a stag was lying—but the heavy rain of the early morning had thwarted the harbourer's later efforts, and he could offer no certainty. For an hour or so the tufters were drawing in vain, then they roused a stag of fine frame but moderate horns; hope rose high, and picnic parties paused for a while. But moving into the deep hollows of Seven Wells Wood he defied all efforts to dislodge him, till the afternoon was more than half spent, and any huntsman less wiry and determined than Arthur Heal would have been wearied. Backwards and forwards he dodged and twisted, often threatening the open, but again retiring to shelter. At last some eight or nine couple of hounds were loosed at his heels; and in the end he was forced away with his head to the sea, and the line of coverts before him. The leading hounds were stopped, and the whole body fetched from Quantock Farm and laid on while yet scent was warm—*i.e.* when not more than three quarters of an hour had elapsed. Ye gods, what would a Leicestershire huntsman give for such a scent as that? Why, he need *never lose a fox!* and might wash his hands in blood till even his huntsman's love for slaughter was satisfied! The new pack were not altogether at home at starting. The high heather and still higher oak-shrub bothered them no little. But Arthur pushed them along the line for an hour, through combe and over hill till he had to abandon pursuit in the deep glens above Holford. How we rode the hill top, or struggled through the brushwood in his wake, it will not interest to tell. One result of the day was that the determination was registered in more than one instance to await another week and a return to Exmoor.

And yet on Monday next (Sept. 2) the new pack were at last blooded—and from the Quantocks. Two stags were roused from Buncombe Hill, near the Master's residence, within the

first few minutes of drawing. One of these went away unpursued—in his course taking a turn over the railway, and running the gauntlet down the platform of one of the stations on the line. The other was a heavy old stag with a single antler. From where the field stood he could be viewed making his way over the enclosures below; and soon the pack were moving after him, while following sportsmen made their way by means of gates and roads. A point of some half a dozen miles was run in an hour and forty minutes; a fallow deer chopped on the way, and the bigger animal killed five minutes afterwards—on the plain within a few miles of Bridgewater. The pace was not great, but the result was satisfactory, and the long sought object of blooding the new comers was at length attained. That a stag should from the Quantocks descend into the inclosures of the lower country is looked upon as a somewhat singular occurrence.

September and early October are by no means less favourable for a venture with the staghounds than August. On the contrary, I am led to believe that, especially this year, better sport is likely to happen in the second than in the first month of hunting. Both deer and hounds will be more capable of putting forth their full powers. The former will no longer have their horns in velvet; but will have recovered all their natural vigour, and be more ready to run than when first disturbed in the heat of August. The latter will have gained not only improved condition, but, in the case of the young pack, experience of what they are called upon to perform. Moreover, there will be more for the visitor to do during the coming weeks than hitherto. The staghounds meet, as a rule, but twice a week. Now, two days' occupation, as against five of thorough idleness, is a proportion not all suited to the taste of a man of vigorous habit. And I defy the author of all mischief himself to suggest employ for so many surplus hours, if his ground be limited to any one of these quiet watering places.

In my opinion he has long ago been completely *ennuyéd*

away, and betaken himself to more fashionable fields. The scribbler of course has his occupation, and must be, or may be, a hermit *ex officio*. But even he has his readers to consider, and must not quite trample their patience underfoot. For my part, I consider two days' hunting a week is only just enough to make you want more; and tends only to whet your appetite, and render you restless and idle on the off days. I am tired of picking shells and I never cared about picking shrimps. I forgot to bring down a gun, or possibly I might have been caught poaching a rabbit. There are said to be trout in the West Country; but none of them stray near this seagirt hamlet. Indeed, for lack of more exhilarating occupation, most of my many spare hours are spent in a loose box—there to study at leisure a splendid instance of the incisive power of Somerset stone, as used by the natives in revetting their hedgebanks. The subject is my best horse (we always say it is “our best”), who in letting himself quietly down (as any sensible animal would) from the top of a moorland wall, tore skin and flesh away, almost from fetlock to hock. I mention this (the result of the single risk to which your careful correspondent has exposed himself) solely in the hopes of deterring adventurous strangers from indulgence in the hazardous pleasure of “throwing a lep,” during their sojourn in the West. The prudent principle of “*going round*” is here exemplified with clearest force. The delight of a jump has no place among the attributes of the Chase of the Wild Stag. Thus, the horse for this country may be built on totally different lines from such as are wont to catch the foxhunting eye. As Capri Bianco is the wine for South Italy, while in Sicily you swallow Marsala with gusto, so the Somersetshire horse is the nag for Exmoor. His shoulders are short, his appearance is mean, but his manners are excellent. “Stuggy” and sturdy, he may have the blood of Katerfelto; but he shows it rather in his powers of endurance and bottom than in comeliness of shape or refinement of appearance. But he can hustle through the heather, slide down precipitous declivities, clamber out of rough combes all day,

and perhaps make himself very comfortable in a grass field all night.

One more word (don't snap your watches so loud, please, beloved hearers) to those who, like myself, come down thus to a "strange countrie" and a novel sport. Besides making your railway journey a delight by aid of the pages of Katerfelto, arm yourself for thorough, and most pleasant, study with Collyns' "Chase of the Wild Red Deer" (Longman and Co.). You will then start with all the knowledge that anything but actual experience can give you, and enter upon a new field better posted than was he who now proffers the impertinence of advice unasked.

The Wild Stag on Exmoor will require horses enough for two days a week, perhaps five days a fortnight. And in August you may, indeed *must*, accordingly limit your amusement to these days, while your stud may best be fixed at a couple of strong-backed horses and a pony. The pony will carry you to covert and take you to see the tufting; while your horse each day may be left where the pack are kennelled, and will afterwards show you as much of the sport as immunity from accident and your own luck and prowess will allow.

In September and October you may extend your stable, stretch your purse, and throw away the cigar of idleness. For, if time be an object only to be got rid of as pleasantly as can be, the saddle may be your base of operations daily, and the process carried out, under a variety of scene—and with a constancy of appetite that can compete with Exmoor mutton six times a week. The Stars of the West are out on the hills on two days, and Mr. Snow will show you how a heath fox can be rolled over in forty minutes, with every accompaniment of music and a dashing head. Mr. Froude Bellew will tempt you from your bed to display the powers of the Dulverton pack to work their fox to death without interference. Mr. Luttrell will hunt the worshipful animal twice a week round Minehead; while if you are not above galloping to eighteen-inch hounds after a stout moorland hare, Mr. Chorley will invite you to

ride with him round Dunkerry, or Mr. Clarke will give you a spin on North Hill. So every day may be filled up: and time need hang no heavier than your debts. There are sportsmen who languish between the early grouse and Kirby Gate, who do not shoot in Norfolk nor attend Newmarket, who hate Brighton and have no soul for Scarborough, but who would gladly leap to boot and saddle, months before November. Let these come down to Devon and Somerset, leave foxhunting out of thought and out of comparison, and try the wild staghunting as (to them) a novel sport, an art and practice of itself, as, in fact, a separate science to be studied. Let them divest themselves of the idea that it has anything in common with a burst after the fox—save in the note of the horn and the breed of the hounds. They will see something of venery quite different to what has fallen to their lot before; and they will see it with the happiest accessories of nature and landscape.

My acquaintance with Exmoor, with its inhabitants (or rather, its neighbours, for there are not even gipsies on the Forest now) and with its visitors, has necessarily been a brief one. And so any attempt at naming them must of course be incomplete. Yet, though by no means amounting to a full list, the following few names, of men prominent in the Hunt, will be found not altogether inaccurate.

Among the leading local residents, or subscribers, or both, are Lord Fortescue (whose two sons are more often in the field); Sir Thomas Acland; the Rev. J. Russell (known to all the sporting world, and knowing as much of sport as can well be learned in fourscore years and odd); Sir Alexander Hood of Audry and Mr. Carew of Crowcombe (both of whom have good coverts at the Quantocks); Mr. Knight, Mr. and Mrs. Froude Bellew; Mrs. Rowcliffe, Mrs. Lock-Roe, Miss Leslie, Mr. Luttrell of Dunster and his sons, Messrs. W. Karslake, Daniell of Stoodley, Doddington, Bouverie, Norman of Luccombe, Hancock of Wiveliscombe, Dr. Collins of Dulverton, Mr. Battersby, Messrs. Glasse, Capt. Luttrell, &c.

And of the visitors, so far, Mr. and Mrs. Granville-Somerset,

Lord Rock Savage, Messrs. Bolden, Codrington, Blagrove, and Sperling (all at Minehead), Hon. J. Trollope and Mr. Horsey at Dunster; Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, Col. Festing, Miss Festing, and two young sportsmen of high promise; Col. Williams, R.H.A., from Exeter; Mr. and Mrs. Warren, Mr. and Mrs. Baker, Mr. and Mrs. Turner at Lynmouth, Dr. and Mr. Budd at Linton, Rev. Tothill, Mr. Foster Melliar from Oxfordshire, Messrs. Allen and Lindham at Porlock Weir, Dr. Bassett, &c. The yeomen of the neighbourhood are nobly headed by Mr. Nicholas Snow of Oare, who, while holding some 3,000 acres of land of his own and keeping a pack of foxhounds, takes pride in maintaining all the traditions and style of an honoured class. And in this and in prowess with hounds he is fully followed by Messrs. Chorley (of Quarne), Joyce (of Timberscombe) and Walter Snow. Mr. Halse is, perhaps, the greatest authority in the Hunt on all matters connected with the chase of the stag. Mr. Parramore has also a great reputation with hounds; and no unworthy names are those of Messrs. Baker, Clarke, Rawle, Lyddon, Burston, Birmingham, Lovelace and Ridsen—I wish I knew more of those through whose energetic goodwill stag-hunting is chiefly maintained.

Yard Down was the meet of Tuesday, August 10th, and Yard Down is to Barnstaple much what Cloutsham is to Minehead, or Quantock Farm to Taunton. But unlike the other two, Yard Down is a fixture more associated with good sport than almost any in the Hunt. Three years previously, from a meet at Yard Down, and a find from Molland Wood, they scored a run that will be talked about as long as staghunting survives on Exmoor. Eighteen miles they galloped from point to point, in an hour and fifty minutes—killing their stag under Cloutsham, and five horses on the way. Only half a dozen men were still up with hounds when they brought their deer to bay—Mr. Karslake carrying off the chief honours of the run, while Mr. Snow of Oare and Mr. Parramore did themselves almost equal credit. Curiously enough, only the week before this event, another stag had brought them a like route, in the converse direction—

crossing the moor westward and dying close to Yard Down. Such are runs of which we hear—and such we hoped (alas!) to see to-day. To watch a stag hunted to death through brake and coppice, gullies and streams, roads and cramped country, is a sight, and a study, interesting of itself and peculiar in scene and feature. But the good bold gallop over the forest is the western staghunter's hope, the object for which he cheerfully jogs his five-and-twenty miles to covert. It is this that he will tell of as a type of his country's favoured sport; and his cheek will glow as in description he carries you for two hours over the brushing heather. But he speaks of a rough road-and-covert hunt without enthusiasm; sighs over the glories of the past, and condoles with you that the present should offer samples so inadequate.

To-day was by no means without its incident, though wanting in the special event with which we had hoped to connect it. Stags were roused, a stag was run, and a stag was "pulled down in the open"—by no means a common occurrence with an animal that usually awaits the huntsman's knife in the water. Yard Down is, to all appearance, represented only by a farmhouse, situated just below the extreme south-western edge of the Forest of Exmoor—some nine miles, as the crow would fly, to the south of Linton and Lynmouth, and about the same to the east of Barnstaple. From Lynmouth the road first winds upwards through a lovely wood (to-day fresh and dripping from last night's rain, and now gleaming in every leaf under the brilliant sunshine); then, leaving the brawling trout stream behind it, breaks at once on to wide-stretching moorland, bare of heather here, but boasting of a soft covering of coarse, and fairly firm, turf. So on past Mole, which tradition assigns as the bog in which a man and horse were swallowed, to be found perfectly preserved in death fifty years afterwards. And of course tradition must always be held true, or how would any history fare?

You can't quite travel as the crow (though the ill-luck which has so persistently accompanied your presence with the Devon

and Somerset might fairly stamp you as a bird of ill-omen), so your ride is a hot twelve miles before you reach the meet—just in time to drop into the stream of horsemen and vehicles now pouring off down the lane after the moving pack. Mr. Joyce's figure is prominent to all who will see it as they should do—as he stands in the roadway with his Deer Damage bag outstretched. Mr. Russell, a few hundred yards further on, is collecting shillings for some similar object. It is worth more than a shilling to see him *any* morning; so, very few men are likely to grudge the contribution. The lane is only just wide enough for a waggonette, of which there are plenty, and not nearly wide enough for kickers, of which there are many more. Every other horse seems to be a colt just bridled; and, as the lane is, westcountry-fashion, burrowed out from the adjoining level, the high banks effectually bar the timid stranger's escape. Soon, happily, an open gateway shows a grass field, wherein the bulk of the cavalcade proceed at once to bivouac. It is only a mile from the covert, 'tis true: and of that covert they can see nothing! But, hush! we are not telling of a fox-hunting scene on a cold winter's morn in the Midlands. They manage these things better on a sunny day's staghunting in the West—and there are sweet spirits and kindly hands in those waggonettes that will yet render grateful help to the weary sportsman, and raise him to bear the heat and burden of the day.

On either side of a narrow valley, through which rattles one of the many moorland streamlets, is Molland Wood. The pack are stabled close at hand; but the first half-hour's tufting (the most critical time of all, as testing the success of the harbourer's work) passes in silence. So does another hour, when hope, almost ebbed out, found new life in the sound of an opening bound—only to be roughly extinguished when, five minutes later, a hind breaks through a delighted, screaming, crowd of footpeople on the opposite hill. Molland Wood can furnish nothing more, and at two o'clock a move is made to another wooded valley, Gratton by name. A stag of fabulous size and age is said to be harboured here; and fervent prayers are

loudly expressed that not he, but some lighter and more galloping deer, may be found. So far, wishes are to be realised. Ten minutes has not elapsed ere note of hound and horn proclaim a find; and almost at once there issues a flying deer, nimble of limb and light of body, breaking upwards in the desired direction of the Forest. He cannot quite face a knot of a hundred horsemen; so rounding the old ruined mansion of Lydcote Hall (the birthplace of Amy Robsart) he again makes his point over the enclosures beyond. For a long distance he can be seen bounding over the fields, leaving each huge wall and bank easily behind. "He's going straight for the Moor, with only one little covert before him!" "Surely we must ride over the Forest to-day!" And hope and aspirations, long suppressed and pent up, make men almost quiver in their saddles. Twenty minutes waiting for hounds may be nothing in staghunting. It would *kill* us at Crick or the Coplow. To *some* at least it seems an age *now*, before Arthur appears with the scanty remnant pack (not more than eleven couple in all)—the fierce old veterans of years of successful chase, small in number now, but giants in prowess; strong as mastiffs, tenacious as bulldogs, and staunch as bloodhounds.

Work has given them back all the vigour wasted in their long confinement; and they show out to-day in far superior form to that of the earlier hunting. They go into the scent with a rush and determination that I have not seen with the deer before; and they own it—not with a noisy cry, but with a note that, if subdued and under the breath, is fiercely earnest. Through a few inclosures, and then into the wooded basin of Whaddifell, already studded round with groups, who according to their custom, have, some minutes ago, hurried off to a point. Not one stag, but two (a panting rustic avers there were *three*) have entered the wood—Now the tale becomes pitiful, and tearfully we ask for sympathy. A stag *had* gone on over Exmoor, —before him nothing of refuge within a dozen miles, save a passing bath in Badgworthy Water. Hounds are at fault for a minute or two—time enough for at least a score of proffered

opinions to be thrust into the huntsman's ears (ears that should be, and, it is to be hoped, *are*, at such a moment deaf as door-posts, to everything but absolute and tangible information, on which to frame action decisive and untrammelled). At length the pack are laid on to a track entering the wood—as fate would have it, *not* the track of the forward deer. This line leads them back to Molland Wood, men following under the weight of crushed hope and pungent disappointment. Through woodland ride and deep-cut lane, by riverside and marshy meadow—instead of over the free wide common and the rich deep heather—we follow for an hour and a half, under the blazing heat of a sun that is little like that of an English September. The stag must have felt the sunshine even more; for the course of his last half hour is never a hundred yards from the River Bray—hounds hunting him with a tenacity that leaves him no chance. By Castle Hill he follows the stream till it runs under the railway; leaves the water, in view; and, with the pack rushing in for blood, struggles up the embankment of the line. On the railway they are round him in a moment. He turns for a last effort, and breaks through them on to the viaduct. But like wolves they fasten on him from head to haunch. Two, bolder than the rest, have him by the throat. With a mighty struggle he shakes them off, with what strength is left drives his antlers upon them, and rolls them howling across the rails. But his race is run, his life is all but gone. With their very weight the huge hounds bear him down, the knife is at his throat, the pack is whipped off, his carcase hurried off the metals—and in a moment a train rushes screaming over the spot of the death struggle. So nearly does Mr. Bisset lose the few of his old favourites still left him after last season's misfortune.

It was a young stag that died. "Not more than four years old"—so said the experts who proclaimed him to have but "two on top on one side, none on the other, and no bray." And he died quickly for so young a deer. But the day was intensely hot; and he was fat to a degree altogether unbecoming to youth;

though his haunches should bedeck a table none the worse for this reproach, and certainly the hounds fell to with no less gusto, on the portion assigned as their share.

An honest thirty miles ride home—not at all an uncommon distance in connection with the wild stag, either, oh ye men of Melton!—was the lot of your humble servant. The moon was shining brightly over the heads of the dark and ghostly combes of Cutcombe; to help him home. But, again, when it lit up the watch from a still dinnerless waistcoat, and told that ten o'clock was past he ceased to wonder that staghunting should be entwined so intimately with heavy outdoor luncheon—and he laid his head on his pillow that night to dream of “*Foxhunting, God bless it.*”

ROEBUCK SHOOTING ON THE BANKS OF THE RHINE.

I.

ROEBUCK-CALLING, or roebuck-poaching, would be an equally applicable term to apply to this curious, legitimised, sport. Many queer methods of killing game have I witnessed and shared in, from my youth up—from tickling trout to angling for albatross, from tiger-netting to deer-shooting by torchlight. Now I have lived to shoot roebuck to the call; have been immensely interested in the pursuit, and consider I have taken part in a phase of sport about as justifiable as shooting a fox—a form of murder I have never yet been able to bring myself to, even in countries where poor reynard is as vermin as a wild cat.

My basis of operations was Baden Baden. Now, Baden, though a lovely resort—where the sun and the flowers are always bright, the leaves always green and the shade always cool—where music fills up half the day, and is apparently sufficient for all the remaining energies of those who bathe, of those who come newly married, and of those to whom promenade and pretty frocks are life—yet Baden, with all its charms, is apt to pall upon a man of active habit and tolerably sound body. There is no polo, no cricket—yes, there is lawn tennis, and there is trout fishing. It would seem a hopeless, not to say senseless, task to inquire after shooting in the month of July. But I made the inquiry nevertheless—encouraged by the sight of venison at the *table d'hôte*; and, as usual in such cases, made it in various directions before I

could strike information of any value. At length I was sent by a kind acquaintance with a letter in hand to the man really in authority over the public shooting land. All was plain sailing now. It was arranged for me that two days hence I was to put myself under the guidance of a head-forester, and was to be taken forth with a view to slaying roebuck. Meanwhile, I had to "rustle up" a gun (smooth 16 bore, and cartridges of No. 3 shot the gunmaker insisted), I had also to obtain a ten-mark permit from the Kur-saal (which seemed to me very much akin to applying at the Trocadero or the Empire for a game-license), and I had further to attend at the police-office armed with another twenty marks—of which I was disarmed after an hour's dumb confinement with an official who made notes on the colour of my eyes, the tint of my remainder hair, on my length of limb and my measurement of figure.

Observe me, then, at one o'clock on the day in question (a very hot day it was) seated in a landau—for Baden Baden descends not to cabs or suchlike vulgar vehicles; landaux-and-pair, with liveried coachmen, being its only stage carriages. Starting thus for a shoot—and a very problematical shoot, too, I feared—I was in doubt whether my position was more that of a prince-imperial going forth to a regal chasse or that of my countryman 'Arry setting out for Epping Forest on the Monday of Easter. No, there was too much state about it for the latter. The hotel porter swept his goldlaced cap to the ground, the proprietor gave me his blessing and blindest smile as he bowed me into the carriage, and the waiters, while lifting a hamper on to the box, flung at me all such sweet expressions of good wishes and congratulation as they could put into English. Oh, the start was deliciously "chalk." It was a dream for a cowboy of an "English-lord a setting out hunting."

I then picked up the oberjäger (if you don't speak German I'll help you—that's an upper hunter, and should be spelled with two dots over the a): and a grim, warlike looking old

sportsman he was, clad in a brown cotton cloth suit, suited to woods and weather, while I was arrayed in cockneydom's gayest tweed—having ample and snowy cuffs protruding from, and stiffly starched collar surmounting, an attire that wholly precluded any possible presumption of sporting proclivities. It is not many years since I nearly drew the contents of a Winchester upon me by means of similar incongruity of costume. Descending direct from civilisation and a trans-Continental train, I struck 200 miles across the prairie to seek an outlying ranche with a view to stock buying; and on nearing it called suddenly at a solitary cabin to enquire the way. The noble proprietor saw us coming, made sure that no one but the sheriff and his men would be abroad on the prairie wearing "biled rags," ran for his gun, and a moment later was covering us through the half closed door!

For company when after the roebuck I had been fortunate enough to secure the society of a young German friend, who, besides breaking up the *tête-à-tête* between myself and my guide and counsellor (with whom the only means of direct communication one with another would have been French of the most indifferent quality) was able to extract information from the old man's not very discursive lips in answer to various queries as to the country and its game resources.

The drive of ten or a dozen miles was not altogether uninteresting. Harvest was in full swing; and the method of farming and manner of harvesting were both to be studied. Peasant-proprietorship is the system of the Duchy of Baden; and apparently satisfactory enough in its working. Poverty and distress are almost unknown, and the land is farmed to the best purpose—each man with his household cultivating no more than he and they can manage properly. Be it remembered, however, that these are industrious and frugal Germans, and that this is some of the most fruitful soil in Germany. They put not too many eggs in one basket, these careful Teutons. On their holdings a strip of wheat runs alongside an acre of potatoes; half a dozen rows of hops grow side by

side with a patch of tomatoes; and so on. The corn yield of the present year was said to be in excess of any for thirty years past; and they were busy, the man and his wife and the girls, getting it carried off with all expedition, mostly by ox, or rather cow-drays—the bright, healthy faces of the girls peeping out from the clean kerchiefs that bound their heads, and the milking cows and heifers taking their turn in yoke and collar. The most prevalent and to all appearance the most natural and comfortable manner of harnessing the sleek kine (they are of a high-bred Guernsey-like type) is to attach the weight they are to draw to brow-bands below their horns, so that they push, as it were, with their foreheads. But custom seems to vary very much. This is also the plan by which the heavy timber is drawn by cows and oxen from the Black Forest. Collars and the more familiar wooden yoke are almost as commonly used. And under the hot sun a cloth often covers each of the cattle to protect them from the torturing flies.

Horses there were at work also—upstanding, well bred, horses too—more like our London hansom cabhorse than the ordinary beast of agriculture. Some, I believe, are cavalry cast-offs; but, whatever they may be, they are of a class far superior to any I have ever seen in the hands of peasants. As, however, I saw not a single foal alongside the many mares at work on farm and road, I can only conclude that the farmers of Baden do not lay themselves out much for horsebreeding. As there are few open grass tracts, and fences are almost unknown, possibly they consider that young stock would be more trouble than profit.

Excellent roads, and very little dust—a dreamy drive under the soothing sun—and everything that was to be seen coming placidly in one's way without effort or exertion. Drone among bees. A loafer among toilers. Who shall say that the idler is the happier? Not I. Yet Baden-Baden is an idler's elysium—and a true elysium so long as rest is welcome, until inactivity takes the form of aimlessness, and the sweets of idleness cloy on the palate. Then, if laziness is not to become

a disease, and energy is not to moulder and die, a man's whole desire is for object and action—and even a harvester's toil seems an enviable and worthier lot.

Now to shake ourselves clear of inertia, now to light upon our feet, and enter the cool green wood, was in itself a welcome change—a move into action of some sort, a grip of the hand with Nature, and a throwing off, in some degree, of burdensome sloth. Another forester stepped out of the shade, gun in hand, doffed his cap to his superior and the strangers, proffered information or suggestion, and piloted us into the covert—a lowlying forest of oak and beach, acacia and ash, having underwood of similar growth and narrow rides and glades of moist, green grass.

Under his direction the oberjäger, leaving the others hid at a little distance, would place me now and again in some leafy ambush having a space more or less clear of covert to our front, while he stood behind and brought his call into play. *Bla-a* sounded the whistle, like a child's toy, every thirty seconds—the old forester's cheeks expanding audibly, and your humble servant, not without a twinge of shame at the whole process, standing eagerly at the “ready,” with every sense alert and every feature a prey to the hungry mosquitoes. Surely no battle between duty and inclination, no fight between what one ought and what one wished to do, ever called for severer strength of mind than this struggle between the necessity for intense quiet and the distraction of these heartless, bloodthirsty insects.

At times it seemed unbearable. You know it well—any who have ever watched the jungle by moonlight, or have even stood at attention on parade with a fly on your nose. But *bla-at* he never so coaxingly, charm he never so wisely, and shift our ground as often as we would, no sign of roebuck or of living beast (save the mocking of the jay) was forthcoming, while two hours stole by, and the old grenadier ejaculated with increasing gutturalness and impatience, as he left each lair. I lit my pipe, for the double purpose of soothing myself and

quieting the mosquitoes. "No smoke," said the ancient—finding his English for the first time.

It was useless for me to argue that if the animal would smell smoke he would surely smell us; or recall travellers' tales from other climes to persuade him into concurrence. He would certainly neither understand nor accept such conclusion. He was lord paramount for the day; I was his slave, and there was nothing for it but to pocket my pride and my pipe together.

Now he pointed out where the object of our search had been recently scraping and stamping under a tree; fresh slots were visible all round; and I began at last to believe that roebuck might after all be no mere prehistoric animal as regarded Baden. So languishing attention was sharpened up, the swollen muscles of the face were again surrendered peacefully to the buzzing enemies, and I stood again as watchful as a sentry on a dangerous outpost—endeavouring with rigid neck to look in several directions at once. Of a sudden, the remotest corner of my right optic jumped, as it were, to a quiet movement just within its focus. Hitherto it had caught nothing more than the flutter of an occasional butterfly, the flight of an insect, or the passing of some tiny bird from bush to bush. But instinct told that this was something better worth watching: so, without turning my head or moving a muscle, I brought both eyes round as far as possible, and awaited development. A second later a little red head peered round a tree only a few yards away, a miniature pair of horns came forward like feelers—and I deemed that the chance had surely come. In my ignorance I had expected some answering call to that of his supposed lady love; but the little gallant had crept up in silence and stealth, and was now peering curiously round him for the siren that had lured him. Another moment and he would be clear of covert and at my mercy. Moreover, apart from the savage instinct of killing, I was anxious for further acquaintance. But the curtain was suddenly pulled down by another hand. The old shikari behind me, either distrustful of

my alertness or of my experience, or else himself carried away by excitement, poked me sharply in the ribs while assailing my ear with a fierce stage whisper. Round came the roebuck, and I with equal celerity—his movement prompted by alarm, mine by anger. For a moment I knew not whether to laugh or to swear. The roebuck might go where he liked. I would take no snap shot when thus robbed of a certainty. So away he went, barking loudly his defiance and fear—while having relieved myself of a single very deep one, I laughed heartily in the chagrined face of my over-zealous mentor.

II.

'Ten minutes' rest, and a solacing pipe, after the catastrophe mentioned in the previous article. Then, working onwards by many a leafy retreat, the call sounding ever in vain, we suddenly issued on to the bank of the Rhine—the blue waters flowing briskly at our feet, as we stood on its stone bound

towing path. A bathe was very tempting, and the cool water sorely enticing. But the stream ran faster than a lame man could walk. How then could he hope to swim, except whither it might choose to carry? So we drank and turned away—a covey of pheasants, with heads erect above the grass, running back into the low jungle as we passed on. Though late in the afternoon, the summer sun was blazing terrifically; and the green woods—with all their mosquitoes—were preferable to the glare and heat outside. By this time my old shikari and I had both fairly recovered ourselves—and if we still thirsted for blood, it was not for that of each other. Working back towards the village wherein our trap had harboured, we sounded every glen, and set the call going about every quarter of a mile.

At length we took up position at the junction of two narrow grass-carpeted glades; and from the shelter of a straggling bush kept watch as before. *Bla'a* went the lamblike whistle: *gurgle* went the old hunter's cheeks; while round our twitching faces the mosquitoes played waltz and hymn (they seem to hum any tune your fancy of the moment may suggest). The afternoon was closing in; no response had come to the forester's monotonous plaint; and the chances all pointed to returning home empty save of recrimination and of an opportunity thrown away. Still, patience had by this time become almost a habit, and expectancy our natural state: so we were no whit surprised or startled when a roebuck burst into view and came fairly dancing down the glade. Bright, perky and happy the little fellow looked—as dapper and self-confident as the Favourite (the dandy in doublet and hose of the well-known picture). It was a sin to pull trigger against such beauty and life. But as well ask the butcher to stay his knife from the lamb, or the gentle fisherman to withhold his instrument of torture from the speckled trout. The deed had to be done—for we had come forth to do it. As the showy little gallant cantered to within thirty yards, he met the shot full face; and, blundering on rolled over to the second barrel. The work of cleaning and packing was achieved in neatest form by an under-forester—to.

whom fell the liver, in Scotland held to be the titbit of a roe. The rest of the animal by no means becomes the property of the shooter. *His* only perquisites are the horns and an inch or two of skull as trophy. He has the proud privilege of buying his game, if he choose: if he does not, it is sold piecemeal for the benefit of the poor.

Now for the hotel-hamper, for a supper washed down by the wine of the country, and for home. Every village in the duchy of Baden has its clean hostelry and its very drinkable wine. Could you but transport thither the tea-house moosmies of Japan to infuse merriment and picturesqueness into the scene—bah! as well say, could you but make a sausage into a vol-au-vent. Baden, with all its charms, is not the land of the Holy Mountain. Grandly beautiful, though, it looked in the setting sun—as the red orb dipped behind the Vosges Mountains, and the queen of night at the same moment rose clear and round above the dark brows of the Black Forest ranges ahead. Comfortably and contentedly we drove back in the cool evening—across the half-harvested plain, and past cart after cart laden sky-high with golden grain and laughing peasant girls. The fair ladies (save the mark—but bless their jolly faces) seemed by no means worn or depressed by the work of the day; and the gay young Teuton beside me got many a joyous response to his gallant sallies, while I perforce lolled back in dumb propriety.

To have seen the sport was something—might have been enough (for, after all, was it quite an orthodox and honest method of game-killing?) But 'twould have been rank extravagance to have rested content, now that the piper was paid, and one was still bidden to dance. Besides, however much one's fastidious soul might rebel against the method, there was at least this to be said in its favour, that the victims were only of the superfluous sex. No need of "'Ware doe," or whatever may be its synonym in German. Also, as one's permit-card said plainly, roebuck were the only game at present in season—and they enforce the game laws closely and fairly in Germany,

recognising, as the farmers of England do now with regard to hares and rabbits, that when the wild animals become public property they soon cease to exist either for food or for sport.

The next occasion was arranged with a view to an early start, a whole day's outing, and, possibly, a larger hamper. We left the town while the morning was yet cool : and an hour's drive put us as far on our way as Rastatt, a Prussian fort and depot. The great drill ground on the plain was covered, as we approached, with dark, moving masses presenting at a distance all the appearance of great flocks of wild-duck upon a lagoon. As we neared the fortress a regiment was just returning from its morning work, and we pulled up at the cross roads as if to take the salute. In heaviest marching order they came past in fours—equipped in every respect as if on a campaign. They had been exercising, it was said, since daylight ; and now it was after nine o'clock. Small wonder they did not look "smart"—even when called to "attention" on approaching the drawbridge. Indeed any of our regiments of volunteers, having colonel and adjutant worth their salt, would—supposing their stamina stood them—have put the Prussians to shame in their marching. With the latter, rigid drill had evidently given place to loose-order and go-as-you-please ; and, beyond sloping their arms uniformly, they made no attempt to pull themselves together "as if"—to quote a sergeant-major's rousing appeal—"they had a sovereign apiece in their pockets." If my soldiering were to come again, I would crave no such playful schooling as four hours' battalion drill in complete marching order, under a killing sun and a murderous black helmet (the most cruel headgear I ever saw carried). It gave one a headache to look at them. Handicapped even thus, these boyish Germans were rosy and vigorous as the youth of the harvest field—probably their elder-brethren emancipated—for the rank and file of these warriors were *very*, very young. Is it all mere play, I wonder ? The frontier garrisons, I am told, are kept at it vigorously and incessantly, as if war with France were already declared. Route-marching by moonlight, gun drill and infantry drill daily for as

many hours as the human frame can stand (even if the commissariat be up to all requirements)—these are the portion of the great Prussian force that lies between Metz and Strasburg: till men and officers alike are worn almost to death, and are longing for the war that they are taught to consider at hand.

For ourselves—again reaching a wood, again a forester stepped quietly from behind a tree (as is their wont on all sorts of unexpected occasions when men are carrying a gun or whipping a stream). As a matter of course, in reply to his chief, he knew of the whereabouts of roebuck—three or four, and one a monster. But these roebuck had apparently moved out of hearing. We toiled all morning, but attracted nothing save the mosquitoes, whose “white wings never grew weary” of hovering round us in clouds. So, when one o’clock came, we moved to a village; and did our duty upon cold chicken and Rheinwein (there is no trouble in becoming a linguist when two languages assimilate so comfortably). The foresters preferred beer, and required a lengthier rest afterwards. But by three o’clock we were cat-calling again; and an hour later we had our first find of the day. Again it was prefaced by many obvious signs of the buck having pawed and stamped under the tree shade—leading one to suppose (1) that roebuck are not so plentiful in the woods as they would have one believe; (2) that they do not very frequently and rapidly change their quarters. In fact, I should fancy they might well be harboured more easily and correctly. This time we must have pitched almost on his lair. At the very first call my eye caught a movement in the covert some seventy yards away; at the second I could plainly make out a red body creeping from the bushes; and at the third I saw a far finer buck than we had yet encountered cautiously advancing with head erect. Now he trotted forward. Now he stopped to listen—a miniature to the life of the red stag of Exmoor, stepping sometime leisurely from his bed. Magnificence in miniature, indeed it was. Now in bold happy triumph he bounded nearer, stamped as he halted, and looked about him in confidence and expectancy. Then the murderer’s turn came

in. A front shot was offered and promptly accepted. The bright gay countenance, the proudly antlered forehead were lost in a smoke cloud. The fell deed again was done, for a certainty. But a moment afterwards the old forester sprang on to a bank ;

and a barrel apiece went from us into thick jungle that we might have bombarded for a week without reaching any object within. The old man had a lot to say, in High Dutch and patois—being evidently of opinion that we had bungled the business once more. Indeed, he pulled me back as if we had been walking upon a wounded tiger, when I pointed out a prone but still struggling form, not ten yards from where our game had disappeared. Then I thought he would have danced—till with a swoop he came down upon the roebuck, and knifed him at the back of the head as you or I would have done a pike. “Ver’ gut roe !” he kept repeating at intervals for the next hour. And this time he consented to act as intermediary for my obtaining the whole head. “Five pounds of meat I

must allow him to purchase"—which I did, and the saddle besides. "Ver' gut roe," we agreed it was, when we ate it to currant jelly and good company the following eve. And its head is a pretty picture—a memo of a quaint sport and a new experience.

GRASS COUNTRIES.

SEASON 1887—1888.

WHILE the circumstance of foxhunting admits of its being done to best advantage on a polo pony, how is it possible to promote it above the grade of cubbing? Ride your hunters if you will, gentlemen, and let us believe you have numberless more, and plenty of the wherewithal besides in the supply store at home. Huntsmen are holding to fourteen hands and "nothing over." Masters can do all their duty on the same standard—is not the outsider extravagant or insane who would essay to soar higher? A mad, fresh horse on the broken hillocky soil of midsummer is an assured agent of mischief to himself and his owner. A walk in the dewy morning has been his allowance. To let him tear about with hounds is to undo whatever good may have been put on him at home; and may very possibly result in the loss of his services at the time of need and fitness. No—I will have none of it. I take my turn with the unemployed. Give me rather the red flag of Trafalgar than the banner of scarlet at Naseby. A horse a day, mine editor, and only for looking at hounds! County nor Provincial bank can stand it. Another month of the same sort, and business and pleasure shall be still further combined. The gate-opener in pink can at all events earn his stable bill. Newmarket, I verily believe, is a more economical place of residence than Rugby, Weedon, or Melton, in this false and extravagant October. At the first-named you can at least restrict the ebullition of your fancy, and the sum you plank upon it. At the others you are paying dead money for excitement that has no existence, for a hazard that is struck

out of being. Horses are useless; hounds cannot be allowed to do anything, beyond eating a fox that won't run—and, in fact, foxhunting is a farce, so far as the present month is concerned. Happy ye, who so often "lose the best month of the year"—as *we* put it, while you are gunning, or you are racing.

Pytchley came to Badby Wood—on a hunting morning such as this October has flung in our faces from the very beginning. "Take the change out of this"—says October, day after day, and week after week. "Blame September, and all the summer—but for fairness sake say never a word against me. Had the others been ready, I have been willing enough." But the temper of the ground could be mollified by no sweet countenance of air and sky. Its face is sternly set against the sport; and till its hard and wrinkled visage be softened and smoothed, it will continue to ignore and repel our trifling.

Saturday, Nov. 12, was a cool, crisp, brilliant day as regards weather, and altogether replete with the best new phases of enjoyable Autumn. The turf had at length yielded in no slight degree to the storms and showers of the previous week—which had at the same time stripped the hedges and laid bare such ditches as had retained any summer blind. There was the gladdening presence of inoppressive sunshine, and a soothing absence of blustering wind. Men in most instances retained the easy, if ungraceful, garb that pertains to the hunting of cub and red deer. So they robbed the scene of no little of its gaiety; and with their redcoats, had possibly left something of their energy in silver paper at home. Else why did hounds slip them again and so readily from Badby Wood?

For 'tis not only in Cheshire that "we are all of us tailors in turn," believe me. Mr. Burton, however, has kept touch of Badby Wood for too many years to be thus easily misled. To follow such a natural pilot should, one would think, have been a common instinct. He would have led us all back over the wooded brow in ample time to see Charles' cap going briskly and his cheery scream resounding, while he laid hounds

on in the grassy valley of Newnham. A timid few were huddled at a none too stoutly barred gateway—when the whip took it in his stride, with Mr. Pallin after him, while Mr. Newbold flew the well built hedge beside. A new aspect was quickly given to the scene. Men were once more riding fast to hounds, over grass that was fit for them and fences of the good old pattern. But the Everdon drain, it would seem, had been a dry earth till the recent rain—and a well-set gallop was nipped in its early bloom.

Now I will venture on a bit of hearsay—as I have it, and with full permission from the mouth of my intimate who waited while the terrier was at work. Well, he had a very big cigar alight—much bigger than he usually smokes even after dinner. But he meant to do his duty by it, and he had worked conscientiously to within an inch of his lips, when a banging great fox with wet brush like a heavy mop, ran almost between his legs. “Up you get, guv’nor!” urged a keen farmer—himself already seated for action. “Jump on, man, dang it! There’ll be a rare jam at the gate.” So my friend Jenkins*—withal he is a careful, not to say needy, man—dropped the burning fragment, and scrambled breathlessly into his roomy saddle. The old horse had nearly finished his nap, and while Jenkins smoked was solacing himself with a chew from the greensward—when the sudden excitement nearly swept the pair off their feet. Jenkins’ spurs were clapped to with a degree of vigour that he only realised when he found himself competing down a well-nigh perpendicular hill, for the gate into the road—through which and its choked assemblage the pair went like a bolt. But their ambition was only roused, their courage just afire. Was not the moptailed fox in view beyond, and the whole maddening furore of the chase in noisy vigour at his heels? Jenkins is not a young man; nor, as he pleads now, a naturally bold one. But Jenkins was on fire! Jenkins must go. Stand aside, cravens. Jenkins is intent! The fence is low—the ditch a conundrum and artfully

* For Jenkins read Brooksby.

enveloped. But Jenkins was in no humour for the road. Hoopla! cried a rude bystander. "Oh dear!" muttered Jenkins—as the Grand Old Quad dropped on the further edge of the chasm. J., again, is not a man who lacks decision. He

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decided to part. And part he did—with a backward parable and a stirrup-iron cleaving in true safety fashion to either foot. Ugh! grunted the venerable hunter, in grateful acknowledgment of a burden removed. Ugh! he grunted again as he found a sound purchase on the fleshier portions of the recumbent Jenkins, and leaped gaily to *terra firma*. The old horse then galloped gaily through the village after hounds, grazed happily in an orchard as they were bayed round huntsman and fox—while Jenkins came home, and told me the tale.

GRAFTON.

THE Grafton, who are in the best of form and fortune, made their mark again on Monday, November 28, with a fast and severe run of fully an hour and a half—part of it over a charm-

ing riding-country, and nearly all over grass. I hear murmur and plaint from various quarters that rain is wanted. But why? Take it all in all, I maintain that this autumn has been quite exceptionally favoured in the matter of scent; and, since we went into pink, the ground has been fully soft enough for gallop and jump. No, we inherited a doctrine from those before us—"the more rain, the better scent." But has this axiom held with the seasons since '70? I think not; but am open to correction.

Monday was essentially a dry day—whether as applied to the atmosphere, the soil, or our palates after an hour's hard riding. The sun shone with an April warmth and with a November slant—but fortunately became mist-hidden ere we turned to ride into its rays. The air was quiet and warm; and men and horses alike carried every appearance of having been through the oven by the time the run was ended.

It began from a little wood, or rather copse, known as Hogstaff, on the Fawsley estate, and about half a mile beneath Preston Capes, the place of meeting. What the redskins of the West would have termed a "heap big palaver" must have been in progress in this bramble-grown *câche*. For no sooner did hounds enter than a whole tribe of sleek furry fellows were afoot—dodging their astonished foes as best they could. One, two, three, slipped away. A fourth fairly jostled against two couple of hounds, and cut through the others, while a crew of foot-people joined in to make the medley complete and noisy. But he too made good the fence, and was away. No start did he get, and for more than twenty minutes had never a chance to catch his breath. Judge, then, if he must not have been a stout fox to stand before hounds—and worse still, before casual viewers and shriekers—for a full hour, and escape at last (I will explain my periods as I go along—and as I decipher the run).

From Hogstaff does Fawsley, the beauteous old-English estate of Sir Rainald Knightley, stretch northward in pasture and deer park—and with every facility to hand in the form of

gate and bridge—till woodland takes the place of grass, and the great covert of Badby Wood is reached. By the ravine side to the woodyard (on the eastern extremity of the park) hounds ran hard ; and went on into the wood on the best of terms with their fox. I am not sure there was a great scent yet. But they started with the nine points of foxhunting in hand ; they were close at him. And neither they nor their huntsman let the vantage slip for one second. The run was made by quickness of hounds and man.

Never was Badby Wood pierced more rapidly. The rides came ready, and the wood was open and palpable. But, keeping directly after hounds, the readiest horsemen made their way through just in time. And now they were on grass again—the line we take every time this year, Newnham to the right Daventry to the front. A little brook was our first fence—and, you know, we think a good deal of brooks in this country, however small, and empty though they be in this drougthy November of 1887. (Yet there was just water enough, they tell me, to welcome one or two.)

Our fox, to all appearance, had at this time some thought of Staverton Wood, but he threw it aside with a swing to the right, and made play for the pepper box on Daventry Hill—the queer erection that looms over the best part of two counties being apparently an old windmill, from which the wind at such a height has filched the sails and dispersed the spars. There are earths, too, on this bleak hilltop—possibly the same as those quoted in the old hunting picture “Get Forrard, can’t you ! Don’t you know the great earth at Daventry is open ?” —the said, or similar and well-garnished words, being directed by huntsman to whip, while the Pytchley were yet some miles from the earth.

To-day’s Reynard had gone on—or, rather, round : and as he mounted the high brow came the first, and almost only, little check. Along the ridge at the back of Newnham, then for a dip into the valley as if for Dodford Holt, and up on to the higher ground once more, where grows a fir clump forming

another local landmark, visible for many miles. While those who could, or would, were wrecking their hats and bruising their features in wriggling through the grove, hounds had warmed to their work forward as sharply as ever—and the next ten minutes were the choicest morsel of the whole good gallop. Between this lofty clump and the villages of Everdon and Upper Weedon lies a brief lovely valley that is second to nothing in the two counties—so say the merry men who lived within sound of it, and sang

Troll, troll, jolly brown bowl !
A laugh and a quaff and a dart for me !
This is the toast that all good fellows boast,
Whether of high or of low degree.

And who saw this dart, with hounds, however others may have comported themselves, to their satisfaction or otherwise, upon a distant parallel? Why, Mr. George Campbell, and Lord Fielding—the latter after coaxing the brown to roll off his back on to his feet once again, the former by dint of keeping the grey mare's head straight, while others were *riding cunning*. The last two unsavoury words embody the explanation. It remains only to be added that there was a brook—and a bridge over which many of us are in the habit of riding to covert, and towards which, of course, we fancied hounds were rapidly steering. Talk of "knowing a country" as a desirable accomplishment! If the country be but tolerably fair and rideable—to recognise it too vividly is the greatest possible drawback, a prolific and shameful source of mistake and disappointment. Two of the most accomplished performers to hounds after whom it has been my fortune to ride were the late Capt. Coventry and Capt. Arthur Smith, still no doubt as straight and sterling as ever. Neither of these knew, or cared, in the least about the direction or geography of a run. The former even jumped into the park of his own old home before realising his whereabouts.

But I am on the wander—as one whose day's hunting has left him close to his inkpot. And, by the way, hounds were much in the same neighbourhood, while Mr. Campbell stood

still and they for a moment had their heads up in a fresh-turned fallow. Quickly, though, they sped on ; gave the water-jumpers yet another easy opportunity at the Everdon Brook, and pointed for Stowe Wood. Headed back when within half a mile or so of this, their fox gained the next hill wood of Everdon Stubbs ; and made for home again by threading the covert and running a-muck through apparently the entire population of Everdon, assembled behind the village. He reached Badby Wood with an hour's hard work completed ; and there, I fancy—and others fancy—that he at once shifted the burden of the day on to fresher shoulders. A tired fox would scarcely have lived through the racing turn they gave him round the whole extent of the wood ; and, though the run recommenced from the same point of exit as before, the venom was out of the pursuit. They hunted up to what we have suggested as the Great Earth of Daventry ; and it is believed they left him there. Time, one hour and three-quarters, or thereabouts.

But now, on coming back to the Laurels at Fawsley House, it was told the huntsman by one who makes gas—a true speaker in this instance, too, in spite of his occupation—“A tired fox has gone in there. I'll show you exactly where he lay down.” And there he lay still ! But was up in a moment ; and with hounds again at his brush, raced back the one mile to Hogstaff—reaching a rabbit hole before they could pull him down !

This is the story of Monday—told rather wordily perhaps, but told while the events remain fresh. The run was a sound and good one—though it went in a ring and ended without blood. I attempt no full list of those who shared in its pleasures. But among them I believe I am safe in naming Lord Penrhyn, Lord Capell, Mr. and Mrs. C. Fitzwilliam, Mr. and Mrs. Byass, Capt. Riddell, Capt. Faber, Messrs. Craven, Burton, Rhodes, Loder, &c.

GRAFTON AGAIN—THAT USELESS RAILWAY.

AGAIN my song, or sorry prose, is of the Grafton triumphs. Friday, Dec. 2, was replete with sport from noon till dark—the items being (1) a half-hour's burst—straight and furious, over the best line in their varied country—to ground; (2) a sharp thirty-five minutes' ring from Charwelton osier bed—finishing with blood in the open; (3) a quick and excellent hunt of some fifty minutes.

But it is with the first that I have particularly to deal—as containing the pith and excitement of the day. It dated from Canons Ashby, the charming feudal seat of Sir Henry Dryden, who, though no longer taking active part in the field, provides constant sport from his well-kept coverts for the Grafton hounds and their following.

The day was bright, cool, and sunny—"gaudy" in fact—and the wind was in the west (whence, if I have not been over and over again deceived by the weathercocks of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire alike, it very often blows when scent and sport are in the air. Huntsmen say otherwise, and hate a west wind; so steeple and stable, gilt chanticleer and golden fox, have no doubt combined to deceive me). But Friday was a lovely day—to see, to hear, to live—and withal to hunt, if things should go right. That they did not go right with everyone, the railway must bear the blame—as I will endeavour to convey. You must know that a line of rail, carrying but very few passengers, and none too many goods, was made some years ago from Blisworth to Stratford-on-Avon, with a view to demonstrating to casual travellers how sweet a valley runs across the heart of the Grafton and Warwickshire countries. Though the public fail to avail themselves in any numbers of the means of sight-seeing thus afforded, the railway still exists as a proof of enterprise, and in full possession of a vale that had far better been left for the untrammelled use of fox and hounds and of men who would ride after them. This railway, then, cuts

between the hall of Canons Ashby and the village of Morton Pinkney—pursuing its way rightward to Byfield.

Thus, as hounds raked across the park and darted under the old elms, men who knew what was before them began to speculate, and to think, while those who knew nothing charged fiercely up to the impenetrable barrier across their path—the lady pack running like birds, and riders loosed forth in all the mad happiness of “a start” achieved. The situation at once became desperate. If hounds should go directly forward, a gallop for the level crossing, 400 yards away, would now mean a surrendering of all place, and but the merest chance left of ever reaching the front again. There *might* be means of exit on the right—at any rate, it was worth seeking. So a baffled bewildered phalanx skirted the railway, and hurried over the fences alongside, in frantic search for an outlet, of which no sign was to be found. Ah, the music grows no fainter; they may yet reach hounds—if only a doorway be forthcoming. The merry clatter sounds positively nearer! Hounds are actually bearing our way! ’Tis *maddening*. And now a queer cavernous dyke with a bordering hedge of dead built thorns, puts a stop even to the galloping search. We are rats in a trap—fools in a fold. And hounds might almost be hunting *us*—as they swing by, along the railway’s very fence. Mr. H. Bourke has marked a weak and breakable spot in the dead thorn; but horses are for some moments averse to crawling into the deep gully, with a view to breasting the black parapet. Mr. Blacklock, however, works through the stubborn difficulty, and opens out a wagon-way, of which all make immediate and grateful use. Now the party are almost riding to hounds—at any rate they are riding in hope, and riding hard, with the fastest of all packs driving onward in plain view—hounds on one side, they on the other of this unhallowed railway. Mr. H. Bourke, Mr. G. Campbell, Mr. Blacklock, Mr. Church, Lord Rodney, Lord Capell, Mr. Adamthwate, and half a dozen others make the party; and they spread out with a broad front, to take the country as it offers. All grass, and all very possible, if decidedly strong. The first

recognised point is the identical railway arch under which we all passed in the good run of two Mondays since, with the same flying lady pack—and at this point men and hounds at length rejoin forces to-day. A minute afterwards the pack has shifted to the other side of the line, and that prolonged bridge 'twixt Eydon and Ashby, with a hundred yards' wing on either side, puts horses again a full field to the bad. Very fast, very stiff, is the definition of the present—and, what is worse, very few to break the fences. Mr. Bourke is turned over by a blind ditch, and growers that will only bend; while a gateway, that might have had the grace to help us all, flaunts a double chain round its post. A few more level fields of sound hard grass—the basis of all this good gallop, by the way—and hounds hesitate and divide, the body going forward for Woodford, some few couples keeping leftward for Byfield. Mr. Campbell pursues the right, most of his companions the left section. We may go with the former and his one or two adherents, and may speculate as we follow, how is he to break out of a meadow that might well answer all the purposes of a corral? Half-blown horses are not fond of a hedge of six-foot thorn. The bottom with a post-and-rail guard is at all events more possible if not very enticing. And there is this about a half-blown horse—he will jump as far as he can when once he has launched himself. So two are over without a fall. No. 3 has an extra stone or two to lift—falls short, and heavily. Now I will tell you of a brotherly act, such as is seldom evolved out of the cold blood of daily routine. Rider of No. 3 picks himself up, as rapidly as the shock will allow. His reins are flung over, his stirrups are righted. Where is his hat? Ready to hand, he crams it on his head—and it stands up aloft like a pea on a drum! Beat it and bang it as he will, the infernal thing won't go home. The hat must be possessed with a devil! "What's this—battered and crumpled? Another hat. Mine! or I'm seeing double. On you go, old concertina. But I won't leave the other fellow's," and, believe me, on labours Tertius with his own Donnybrook crowded close to his sleek cranium, and his forerunner's beaver tucked under

his arm, illustrating the most charitable, kindly edition of the "Rape of the Lock" that was ever enacted o'er the green, green turf.

A shepherd has seen the fox, a ploughman has turned him a hundred yards, a man carting gravel has stood in his way in the purlieus of Woodford; but hounds decipher the whole tangle with never an ear for the wild screams that ring from Hinton Gorse on hilltop beyond the village. Messrs. Campbell and Blacklock then make their way leisurely to the covert side; and, posting themselves on the brow, await the turn of events, while hounds are hunting their way busily through the dense growth. They meant to "brush him" if they could—you may rely upon it! Nor did they intend to be carried forward by any fresh-found fox—let him break never so prettily. For half an hour they had borne the brunt of the battle—what would it not be worth to see the red flag tipped with white hauled down at their feet? But their power of discrimination twixt new lamps and old was not to be put to the test. Hounds dribbled forth of themselves. Their fox had gone on; and at this moment up came the huntsman to keep things together for a finish. And the end was—a drain under Hinton House two fields away.

To turn from the sublime to the ridiculous—from the practical to the fanciful—I would call your attention to a new and, as I shall show, by no means an impossible danger to yourself and comrades as entailed by a temporary disregard to the duties of dress. You may, by pictured advertisement, have been made aware of the virtues claimed for a hooded waterproof cloak—in the which a foxhunter, dogged and determined, faces the driving storm with impunity and an unruffled smile. But the picture, you will note, insists upon a tall hat to surmount the pleased visage and the moustache irreproachable. This, I take it, was the one point missed in my friend's accoutrement on the one wet morning of last

week. He donned the frock, but omitted the beaver. And what happened? He dropped short at a winsome ditch—fence being on the near side—and the horse, “just from a stone wall country you know,” relapsed plaintively backwards, to be buried out of sight—all but his four new shoes. Young Furiosus came after. He had been cigaretting at the moment of starting—“just his infernal luck;” but, like a gallant lad, was hard bent on repairing fortune. He had fixed his place from across a twenty-acre field. What mattered it to him that a smock-frocked shepherd stood waving and gesticulating beyond the gap? All the bucolics in the kingdom shouldn’t stop him. “Mind yourself, old gentleman! out of the way,

you fool!” And my friend Cording had to cut it, for very life, or be ridden on and demolished—while over went Furiosus, clearing the four glistening hoofs, casting a glance of scorn and contempt on his despairing senior, and (as is right and proper) thinking only of hounds in front. Draw your own moral, reader. But don’t disguise yourself as belonging to another calling—or you may be ridden down as a wolf in shepherd’s clothing.

AND MORE GRAFTON.

A VERY pretty hunting run of forty-five minutes and a kill in the open was the outcome of the Grafton Monday (Dec. 12). To pull down a fox in that time of itself proves more than "fair pace." Yet "a quick hunting run" must be the definition, rather than a "gallop" or a "burst," as we are given to employ the terms. It was, from a very justifiable point of view, as unlikely a morning for scent as has been dealt us this season. The ground was half frozen, and wind and weather-glass alike unsteady. Yet hounds ran hard in covert, and at times carried quite a head outside. To drive to covert was about as safe as going by train on a cheap track in Western America. Both down-hill and up, it paid to take the grass siding in preference to the road—and the damp breeze nearly froze your fingers to the ribbons.

Maidston was the meet (where the village boys had made beautiful slides on every yard of meadow): Seawell Wood was the draw—down the wind, as it blew at the moment. Two or three foxes fled at the far end, and together the pack settled on a pleasant and easy line to Litchborough, left that village just on the right, and worked their way (with one trifling check) across the valley for Stowe Wood. Skirting the lower end of this, they topped the hill overlooking Everdon—with again three foxes before them. It seemed to me an instinct—I suppose, though I need scarcely hesitate to employ the only proper term—it was *real talent* on the part of the huntsman that he now took the pack off a new line and carried it forward to strike the true one. And then came all the fun of the fair—caused mainly by the little Everdon brook—about two yards of water and two more of sloping rat-hole banks. The turf was greasy, and horses—naturally timid at water, as is in proper keeping with an education in the Midlands—were even more nervous and helpless than usual. One here and one there slipped in, a couple fell back, a dozen got over, and the rest remained

—while hounds improved the occasion and the pace. And a mile or two farther on the same episodes repeated themselves, to complete the programme of the run—which, by the way, was now taking place over the exact converse of the line held by their Fawsley fox of a fortnight ago. Remember, it was “the flower of the Hunt,” as chosen and separated by the previous streamlet, that now charged the Newnham and Weedon brook. Horses that continued to gallop at it scarcely knew they had been asked to jump—except that in two instances the fact was made known to them by their burden flinging himself on the turf, to prostrate in lowly thankfulness for that the danger was over. But, again, one or two hung on the brink, took in the shallowness of the water, and elected to try the channel. These, I take it (if the owners will believe me when I say I only witnessed the act from a position of distant safety, and quite without any clue to their identity), may—for all we know—have been summered in a running stream—an excellent process, I believe, but one hardly conducive to free water-jumping when the test time comes. For my part, for “Brutus is an honourable man,” I headed the field of art to a bridge fifty yards away—hidden from the more audacious by a tall dark hedge. Hounds threw up at that moment; and in the next were routed by a pair, couple, or brace (whichever may properly express a twain of swine) of fierce rampant pigs, who scattered them right and left in howling confusion. Even this did not disconcert the huntsman. Instinct again triumphed over casualty and circumstance. He held his pack a hundred yards up stream; and they pounced on their beaten fox in a hedge-row—savaging o’er the worry as I never saw a lady pack cling to it before.

With full permission I have a little tale to tell. It involves, as usual, a moral—merely, the necessity of attending to detail, in foxhunting as in every-day and prosier life. These are times wherein men, like hyacinths, bloom early. Whether, like them, they early fade, remains to be seen. Anyhow, men of one-and-twenty nowadays have forgotten far more than we of forty (and

as many odd as can be proved against us) are ever likely to learn. Smartness is their characteristic. They are born to a knowledge of fitness and completeness ; and carry it as bravely to the covert-side as to the smoking room. Now one of these (there is, believe me, neither malice nor bad faith in the disclosure) bought himself a new horse but the other day. "A clipper," he told us, "and the best looking one you ever laid eyes upon." So by train he came to a certain meet above-mentioned—his coterie of confidentials all agape to view the new wonder. He was rather late, but that was scarcely to be wondered at. He had barely time at the station to pitch his furry coat and half a crown to the railway porter, to jump into the saddle as the rugs were pulled off, and away. He looked so pleased ; he looked so pretty. He almost commanded approval and applause, as he gazed around with conscious pride—not for himself but for the beauty he bestrode. Applause he got, and readily—but accompanied by a ring of laughter that grated horribly on his expectant soul. "Confound you fellows, what are you grinning at ?" Hounds were just moving ; and he elected to go—and rid himself of such rude unsympathy. So off he galloped, that at least he might show how Wonder could move. He even larked him over a stile, and flicked him over a sturdy fence—despising a gap. But, wherever he went, the same maddening cackle followed, till he was on the point of fleeing homeward, in fury and amazement. Then up rode one of the Nestors of the Hunt, with never a smile on his kindly countenance. "I say, young gentleman, are you obliged to ride that old horse in four bandages and in kneecaps ? Surely he isn't safe ?" The murder was out. Down jumped the juvenile Crichton. With muttered blessings, and a hot, flushed face, he tore off the bandages and kneecaps left on by the porter as part of his hunting accoutrements ; and stowed them away as best he might under his saddle flap !

For some reason or other the day appeared by no means well adapted to development of the very needful science of gate-opening—an art in which a Northamptonshire field is, as a rule,

second to none. Let me not be misunderstood. Gate-handling is as much a point of skill in riding to hounds where gates have to be used as is ever the power of jump or the faculty of gallop

—and, indeed, is of far more importance, inasmuch as on its acquirement depends not merely the success of our own progress but the sport and convenience of others. I will volunteer no sermon—and I can conscientiously disclaim any personal super-excellence in gate-handling. But I confess and protest that I hate to see a man gallop up to a gate without casting a look at its method of latching, or at the direction of its swing—nor yet change his whip hand—until he is fairly on it, or even has his horse pulled right athwart its opening, while fifty anxious men and women are depending for their start upon his celerity. Still less is it pleasing to see one comer after another let a crowded gate slam to, from sheer inability to hold it as they pass. A single slammed gate has cost many and many a good man all share in a gallop. To-day we suffered chiefly from the complication of excessively narrow gates, an unusual number of kicking horses, and an extraordinary proportion of men who went a-fishing with their crops—sometimes with the wrong

end, still more often with the wrong hand. But the Daventry ball was overnight. And, with regard to the kicking horses, honesty is coming out apace. We all decorate our horses' tails with red ribbon now. It pays, and saves trouble. I should like very much to say what I think—and what most of us think—of a man who will continue to ride hunting on a regular kicker. But I daren't. 'Tis more than my place is worth. Will *you*, please, Mr. Plainspeaker—who tell all the world their sins in a shouting whisper—will *you* give us your sentiments, and benefit five hundred where you offend five—while I await in silence the melting snow ?

Rain and snow, sport and frost—all come within the week's calendar. Foxhunting was at its best a few days ago ; and the weather at its worst in the interim. On Monday, Dec. 19, we could not reach Woodford for the clogging snow—though hounds (the Grafton), being more punctual than ourselves, reached the meet in tolerable comfort—only to return through the downfall.

But the approach of Christmas has been heralded by all the customary signs, besides that of ugly white weather ; and most of us are not unconscious of its coming, albeit, in contrast to the two previous seasons, we have been allowed our hunting even after mid-December. The most novel symptom of its approach, perhaps, was evolved by mere chance towards the close of a recent run. Hounds had suddenly thrown up their heads. Huntsman cast right and left, and was puzzled. "Hark, holloa, forrard !" came with energy from the lips of a *bon vivant* who is usually as reliable as he is outspoken. Grateful huntsman in a moment had his horn to his lips, and his horse tight by the head : the run was surely saved. Hark ! There it is again—clear and distinct this time. *Turkeys*, by all that's holy ! "Oh, mickle have I wandered and muckle have I seen—but view holloas from a turkey never did I ween." Riot upon

hare, riot upon dog, riot upon deer, riot upon cat, riot upon goat, riot upon badger, riot upon skunk, riot upon porcupine—all these have come under my ken in East or West—but never, no never, dear friend, riot upon turkey! And on the part of a clever old hound too—fie, for shame! Strange things are said to have happened in Georgia,

Where the turkeys gobbled that the commissariat found ;
How the darkies shouted when they heard the good old sound !

—but it was not for fox, nor was it for Christmas fare.

PYTCHLEY.

I LOOK upon Saturday last, Dec. 17, with the Pytchley at Badby Wood, as instancing as hard a day's work as is often carried through by hounds and men (I mean the executive, not the casual accompanyists). Eighteen miles to covert, eighteen miles home after five o'clock, were only preface and conclusion—the meantime being occupied as follows.

Badby Wood—as, if you live and hunt in these parts (where no one is held to live at all unless it be for hunting), you probably know as well as I do—is a covert in which nothing remains for long, except the bulk of the field. Hunted by two packs, and preserved by one who might well take post as the Nestor of both Hunts, it is a playground on which the ball is kept almost continually rolling. And the rich grass of Fawsley has scarce time to grow under the players' feet. Foxes fear nothing here save horn and hound: and the note of either has the effect of a catapult upon their wide-awake nerves. On the other hand, nobody would have the effrontery to dub a Pytchley field drowsy, sluggard, or unambitious. Set the man who would dare such aspersion to see a gallop in their company where the timber comes strongest round Waterloo! Or, for variety's sake, pin him with a gouty foot on either leg to take his chance through the bridle-gates of Stanford Hall! No—

but they have a soul above treeland, a spirit superior to rides and rabbit paths! Or why this same old tale? Foxes have no manners: foxhounds no courtesy—and neither one nor the other have the grace to wait till “All On” announces the muster roll, as at the little gorses of Crick, Lilborne, Kilworth, and other fairplay starting points.

This morning, again, hounds found their fox instanter, sent him the length of the wood to the same metre, and were away up the breeze with a contemptuous disregard of all behind them. “West was the wind, and west steered we, with both sheets aft. How could that be?” is a silly old seagoing enigma that many a puzzled voyager essayed to expone this morn. By the time Goodall was on the higher ground above the Byfield and Daventry turnpike, the white bodies (for they all are white in the far dim distance) were flicking over yonder hill for Catesby. And when hounds have a start, and a scent, over hill ground, nor huntsman nor devil can catch them. So even He had three fields the worst of them as he rose and dipped, over crest and trough of upland and valley. His artless henchman had circled the first great hill by darting down the Catesby lane; and thus, with Cpts. Soames and Middleton, now struck the trail with a marked advantage as the more level neighbourhood of Charwelton was neared. But a fox seldom sets his teeth against the breeze for nothing—or for little else than an open earth. This Reynard’s mark was a garden drain; and here the quartette above named pulled up, to groan against the fleeting vanity of earthly joys—a sentiment that was shortly brought home to the refugee, for he was dislodged and unbrushed. And as the garden in question lay ensconced in a quiet hollow, it was for a long time believed that the Badby field had with one accord resented such cavalier desertion by going home to lunch.

Now came an interlude—not by any means an easy one for hounds and huntsman, though little could be done with the fox from Fawsley Laurels. He was hemmed in from his intended break; and so, like many another, became “a bad fox” from

sheer disappointment. When at length they hunted him whither he had no intention of going, the day grew worse, and scent began to fail. I happened to find a little episode to amuse me—but this was enacted in strict privacy, and has no business to be reproduced here. But, as I have an old-time respect for the main actor, and “for fear my spare rib should ache against a jest untold,” I must have it out. He is a sportsman of the old school, and his saddle was built for a bigger man. He galloped to a gate—but the black bullocks beat him on the post: so, going faster than the “quad of his own breeding,” he shot into their midst. Being a man of reading, he had long ago accepted Assheton Smith’s doctrine that one “never looks such a fool as when running after one’s horse”—and, accordingly, he stuck to the bridle with all the strength of manhood and despair. The “quad” didn’t mind that; but the bullocks did—and the quad minded them. The oxen lowered their lengthy horns and bellowed amain. The sportsman hung on—the quad held back. The arena was knee-deep in the rich belongings that surround straw crates and cake troughs. You have read Selous’ graphic tales of lion killing? You remember well how the Boer lion hunter, tied by his wrist to the saddle rope, was dragged before a raging monster that he meant to shoot? This was exactly a parallel position. The horse backed away from the roaring bullocks, and the sportsman, altogether unaware of his peril, ploughed the mire with his back at the bidding of his frightened steed—while the black bullocks bellowed at his heels. How it ended, I know not. There seemed no immediate danger. On the contrary, all the parties concerned appeared eminently pleased and fitted fully into the play. Hounds were running—and I dared not laugh, lest my little story be spoiled or my sense of the obligations of friendship maligned.

Storm of rain saved this fox, and drove the multitude under cow-hovels and behind haystacks (hounds in full tune)—for, mind you, many a bright red coat, though it may be waterproof, is not yet beyond its first freshness, and the age of purple

pink belongs to better times. Readymoney Mortiboy has two coats a year. Joseph and his garments are out of fashion. This is the decade of 1880—and you will please comport yourselves and clothe yourselves accordingly—on credit if need be—but in keeping with '87 still.

A SCRATCH DAY FROM TOWN.

It seems to me that one day's story per week is alone more than sufficient for a hunting writer and reading public—however elastic may be Editor's indulgence and printer's capacity. I have an invention half completed—and have already cut off my old horse's mane to admit of the instrument being carried on my bows. This is—defining it casually, for the invention is as yet unpatented—a combination of the typewriter and the pedometer—and is intended to mark passing events as they occur, having a system of punctuation that shall, for instance, mark an ordinary obstacle by a comma, a rasper by a semicolon, a severe peck by a note of exclamation, and a cropper as a full stop. But, as I have said, this machine is not yet in full work.

Wednesday, Dec. 21.—Pytchley at North Kilworth. 'Tis neither here nor there. But if ever life wears a gloomy aspect, it is when London town is the starting point, and 6 a.m. the call hour. Add to this a doubtful morning, and a still more doubtful cab—I'd sooner be a second whip. And his is no Sybarite's life, if I reckon it rightly—Pytchley of course excepted.

A taste of the last cigar still lingers, long after Euston is left behind. Papers won't interest—war never broke out on a hunting morning. All that is disagreeable in life comes to the front in the chilly atmosphere of a railway carriage. I am a monk. But as a matter of curiosity what are the sensations of the man who has had a "bad night at baccarat" before he embarks? Ugh—hot coppers are more bearable than heavy

bills! A ride to covert gives a charm to life (unless you ride in the agony of a late start); a railway journey begets blue devils. Hunting by train is—better than no hunting. That is all.

A fine hunting run came off Wednesday afternoon. We had seen a fox well worked in the morning—an hour's circumlocution from Kilworth Sticks, till he found a rabbit hole in a gravel-pit near Welford. Then to the Hemplow. Foxes are very lively at this period of an open season. So we plunged down the precipitous hills directly we reached them. Straight for South Kilworth. Men in the fields (every field); so we veered round to Welford and reached the Canal. Character of this hunt was—strong and frequent jumping, steaming horses ever close upon hounds, everybody in a hurry except a patient huntsman. A fair working scent of which the lady pack made the very most. This was a good gallop—though some may say it was not straight enough, and others may urge it was not fast enough, to please them. I can only say that had it been straighter and faster, few would have seen it all. I, for one, should probably have got no more than halfway. Not only did every fence call for an effort, but the hills were distressing. The first half hour brought us round by Welford Village, to skirt the heights of Hemplow; and then came the stout country and steep hills of Elkington and Winwick. Now we rode fence for fence as we did last year from Lord Spencer's Covert, near West Haddon, and swung over the turnpike to Guilsborough.

The check that occurred after forty minutes found most horses blowing, and gave our fox the breathing time that probably saved him—cleverly though Goodall cast back from the plough team. A mile or so previously a casualty befell two of our hardest and heaviest riders, that looked positively awful at the moment; but, happily attended, I believe, with no serious consequences to either men or horses. They galloped at full speed over the precipitous side of a gravel-pit; and came rolling over each other in appalling comminglement of scarlet

and brown. I should not like to have been under any of the four—but am happy to think that no one of the quartette crushed any other. The final check came (time, one hour twenty minutes) among the very turnip fields that ended last

year's gallop. Now our fox crept back through Guilsborough Plantations; and they gave up on the bleak uplands near Winwick Warren. The neighbourhood of Cold Ashby may possibly account for the freezing out of scent, and for the Canadian hue of men's faces. A polar climate this, and one that, while saving many a fox's life, sends many a man home to hot gruel and lumbago. But this is an after thought—only requiring to-morrow's hunt to dispel it as unfounded and shameful. The memory of passing discomfort needs no nursing; and the main advantage of foxhunting is the perpetuation of youth and strength. Even "old boys" are boys still while a keen pack is driving and they are in the swim. 'Twas a pretty, a clever, and an interesting hunt this afternoon.

SCATTERING THE GLOOM.

IF light is to be found in darkness, brightness in obscurity, gladness in gloom, it was surely with the Pytchley on Wednesday, in their gallop through the fog. They had met at Cold Ashby, sauntered for an hour or two in semi-darkness at Winwick, then seized upon a passing interlude—while blue sky and bright sunshine beamed on them for a few treacherous minutes—to cast hounds, and fortune, into the spinnies of Thornby. Two plantations were drawn blank: and a third (it may have been Firetail)—but it matters not—the fog shall be answerable for all inaccuracies, of place, people, and surroundings. All that I pledge myself to is that we ran for two and thirty minutes, and *brushed him*. He found himself, just as the mist came again looming over us. Hounds broke out in music along the tiny dell. Before we fairly knew why, we were away—pouring greedily forth through a gateway where the copse ends, and hurrying in a dazed fashion down to the streamlet that flows from the gully. The first whip was gone. Hounds were barely to be seen but plainly to be heard. We all wanted to go, and there was room for a couple at a time—always supposing these two did not jostle each other in the air.

As I write I feel the fog on me—I must be forrard, or be unsighted, lost and miserable. Let me pose as your pilot. I'll hide our mishaps, and I'll carry you through—let whose coat-tails you like be the real beacon to guide us. You and I scrambled and doubled this first brook and hedge (we'll pick out the thorns to-morrow—also those from the dead hedge in the next near valley). Get off your horse at this loosely chained gate. Now open your ears for the tinkle! Up wind, at your hardest—riding to sound, riding to hope now faint now furious. Here is the Guilsborough turnpike, and all those who have ridden—more sensibly than you and I—are on the left flank of the pack. Two wheat fields, then a grassy dip—the little company as yet pretty compact and plain, though the haze is wrapping their figures more closely each moment. Mr. Gordon

Cunard on the brown and Capt. Middleton on one of his greys carry the front just now. The men of the Kennel are exactly where they should be ; and, as " over to the right, sharp through the bullfinch to the left " is enacted, Mr. Jameson on that wonderful bay mare, Mr. Harford on his little brown, take up the running in turn with Mr. De Trafford (I am taking unusual liberties with names—and please I must do—to illustrate the momentary, shadowy, glimpses of this queer dream gallop). Broken vale and upland is now our lot, as hounds swing rightward still from Cottesbrook (they had hitherto apparently aimed for that district or Maidwell), and bend round for Guilsborough or West Haddon. The turn favours some, while discounting the advantage of others. But the last scene of any width, that lingers in memory, previous to the falling of the close thick curtain, contains a complete reproduction of what I have seen fifty times before, and hope I may yet see fifty times again—a portrait picture that is scarce ever away from a Pytchley Wednesday. For, besides those on whose names I have already seized, there are Mr. Foster, Mr. Pender, Capt. Soames, Mr. Muntz, Major Cosmo Little—I was all but adding two other accustomed leaders and treasured comrades unawares, but they are no doubt hovering somewhere close at hand in the darkness. I am safe, however, from contradiction or mistake in substituting Mr. Rose—and I can put no name to half a dozen more shadowy forms. Goodall keeps his foghorn loudly sounding, and we plunge after him into the night with a feeling that we must cling to him or collapse. Why, here is a turnpike road again—and guarded here by an oxrail we remember well. Surely we have seen it twice before in the two past seasons, as we rode the other way from Elkington and the Hemplow ? John shows us how we may double the rail, and to him we owe direction as we leave the road and ride onward into blank space. An old man is cutting a hedge : and his face of astonishment and alarm as the phalanx gallops on to him is as out of an old Dutch painting, in its dim, red, roundness. Of course he has turned the fox ; and the latter must have run almost against him with-

out betraying himself. I never saw situation grasped and rectified quicker. With one short sharp chirp the huntsman checks the lady pack in their forward cast ; his men pop them as it were into his very pocket, and without noise, hurry, or confusion they are righted and going again in ten seconds. In the next few minutes is concentrated, perhaps, the very kernel of the fun. The darkness is palpable ; the pace is the same ; while the fences are problematical and close coming. The very next jump has apparently no ending. We drop, not into a gravel-pit, but into space : and, maddened with anxiety, find ourselves galloping hard down a white-frosted hill side. Before we know it, we are over a little brook that had nearly swallowed us unawares : and now we are in the wake of half a dozen men helping each other to keep touch of the pack. Now one, now another, catches a glimpse. All are riding with heads bent forward, and best ear to the front—straining their eyes and catching each note—dodging hither and thither as fences offer easiest (for this is no country to trifle with). One makes it possible here, another there—and somehow they hover on the edge of the pack, as it would never be possible, or even fair, in daylight. A true hunter is needed—for now it is a broad stake-and-bound, now a creep. Now into a plantation and out, by guidance of a chance shepherd ; and now a gorse covert looms forth. Winwick Warren. Twenty-two minutes. (You have taken longer than this, Mr. Brooksby, to spell out your horseshoe—though the red ground was hard galloping all the way.) The line holds on, the fog thickens rather than slackens, the pace has already told—and in an open stubble field—ten minutes further, they are on to him openly and fairly. As pretty a kill and as joyous a scurry as we shall see this year. Slacken your girths and be glad.

This is life, and will savour the rest. Foxhunting will help us through *our* time.

MR. LORT PHILIPS.

THE title of "Grass Countries" is apposite enough to Tuesday, Jan. 10, when we rode the turf of North Warwickshire and the greensward of Northamptonshire for some two hours and a bittock. Mr. Lort Philips was at Dunchurch ; and, if I mistake not, hunted the same fox as on the occasion of his last coming. This time it was from Bunker's Hill. We had, to all appearance, made the covert absolutely safe, in the interest of the one main object of foxhunting. But, bother him, the fox found an outlet. Not so easily encompassed was he. I must not stop to consider how to put it ; for the story is a long one, if I fail to compress it. Here is the skimming—till we come to the brook. We went a beautiful line. Grandborough Village is but a mile to the south of Bunker's Hill. Grandborough would have none of him. The village was in readiness, and screamed him off. Interruption of this kind is all against hounds settling, no doubt ; but in this case it worked for the public good, and sent us in a healthy direction. (I had forgotten to note that to-day was as sultry and blazing as yesterday, and that the field took an idle and hopeless view of the situation as at first presented to them.) The start was slow, and scent seemed catchy and faint. Hounds ran leftward under Grandborough ; and by degrees pace freshened and improved. A brook, as you may know, threads the valley before joining the Leame ; and here it offers all the advantages of a screening hedge and a sound take-off. This was our very first fence—and the occasion of such rolling about as made a Morning Performance of itself. Each comer in turn cut a slice off the farther bank : and each accordingly left it worse for his successor. So, what with pecking, scrambling, and diving, there was a heap of a variety. They rolled on the bank, and they floundered below. One even stood on his head for a graceful half-minute—with his white leather lowers poised upwards against his horse's shoulders. I can tell you, however, that half a dozen ladies took their turn of the chasm in safety—making this a veritable creditable sign of the times.

A far less agreeable sign came a little while later—when we got among the wire by Willoughby, and one or two were caught in it, while many others were frightened. Touching the canal at Willoughby Inn, after a sweet succession of flat firm meadows, with hounds going prettily thereon, we turned along it for a mile—till at Barby Wood House we came upon the second whip with his cap up and his throat going, to tell of the fox having crossed the canal where he stood. Now hounds ran their hardest of the day—clinging to the farther side of the canal till opposite Cook's Gorse, then bearing upwards between Kilsby and Barby for Braunston Cleaves (the very same line of a month ago). This was the prettiest part of the run—fences very close together (requiring, alas! an unnatural instinct of Ware Wire before loosing off, or spurring onward), turf very sound, as becomes the dry—and good scenting—season of '87-'88, and the pace sufficient (the Master, Mr. Fabling, Mr. Muntz, Mr. Wilkinson, and Mr. Arkwright cutting out the work). Under Braunston Cleaves came the first real delay. Fifty-five minutes to here—fox close in front—but plenty of go left in him yet. Hunted him short to the right to Ashby St. Ledgers Village—turning and twisting by the way—had him almost in hand at the latter place—but, thanks to holloas and outside excitement, he beat hounds into Welton Place, and there to ground: two and a half hours' run, and a seven-mile point.

I have not done adequate justice to this well-developed chase. I have not even alluded to the morning's cold fog and the day's lathering sunshine. Still less have I told of the bevy of ladies who shamed many a man out of shirking a truly strong country. To name them would be an impertinence, and involve comparison, the odium of which I, at all events, do not care to incur. Again, there was one incident came under my immediate eye, and that I must not omit. A sportsman found his horse in a deep ditch—and five men in kindly friendship stayed to pull him out. Four of these were *farmers*—and just as fond of being with hounds as others. Now my neck is too sore, and my brain too stupid—from craning back to look at the topsy-turvey

man in the first brook—to write more. So to bed before Cold Ashby.

I am delighted to be able to add a postscript to the effect that though one fox undoubtedly went to ground in front of them in Welton Park, news was brought almost simultaneously that their run fox lay beaten in a turnip field behind them, and that they were thus able to go back half a mile to pick him up without difficulty. A good run is never so complete as when it finishes with blood.

CRICK AND KILWORTH.

THE fairest area of the whole good Pytchley country is undoubtedly that which comes within the scope of a Crick or Lilbourne Wednesday—and it was this that they harried (harvested, is a better term) on January 25th. The present being the annual Rugby gala week, the choicest meets and easy hours had been named by the three packs of the neighbourhood, so that all who came to dance might also hunt to the best advantage. On Wednesday, then, the order of the day was Catthorpe at 11.30—and on a beautiful hunting morning—a cool breeze blowing, for dancers to inhale and for all fox-hunters to accept with gladness. The day began badly with the chopping of a fox in Lilbourne Gorse. Then we trotted some three miles, to Crick's famous Gorse; and ranged up alongside the covert in that state of subdued excitement that belongs so specially to the trial of a small and noted covert, to which memory already attaches many a hurried start many a blissful gallop. It had been said there would be an enormous field to-day. If this came true, it was certainly not evinced beside Crick Covert; for, as far as one could see, there were not a hundred riders in the grass field wherein we were bidden to wait. Hunting is assuredly not "going out of fashion," is it? Another term that meets the ear more frequently is that "times don't run to it"—and this, I fear, more correctly expresses the cause of a very apparent falling off in the strength

of these little Pytchley Wednesdays. And that of this week ought, by all custom, to have been, as the "Farmer's Boy," the biggest of them all. But there were plenty, and to spare, who would ride the country, and do justice and credit to the chosen ground of the old Grand Military. I think the day showed that as hard a field was mustered as ever revelled in, pace and good grass. Here are a few names jotted hastily and at random—which at all events will serve in some small degree to show how the field was leavened. The Master (Mr. H. H. Langham), Mr. Lort Philips, Mr. and Mrs. Cross, Mr. and Mrs. James, Mr. and Mrs. Graham, Mr. and Miss Holland, Mr. and Miss De Trafford, Mrs. Dalgleish, Mrs. Byass, Miss Hargreaves, Mrs. Jones, Miss Podmore, Miss Darby, Generals Tower, Magennis, Rattray, Lords Braye, Erskine, Henry Paulet, Captains Soames, Middleton, Beatty, Fawcett, Wheeler, Riddell, C. Fitzwilliam, Messrs. F. Langham, Wroughton, Logan, G. Cunard, Jameson, Mills (2), Tollemache, Scott, Pender, Muntz, C. Rose, Powell, Stirling-Stuart, Sheriffe, Craven, Adamthwaite, Cochrane, Mackenzie, Hazlehunt, Manning, Ford, Darby, Fabling, Atterbury, Elkin, &c.

We stood upwind at Crick; and stood for long without hearing whimper or whisper of a find. We grew almost tired of being anxious, and became gradually careless of the fact that fox, if there was one, might take hounds a mile away, on two sides of the covert, before we could be aware of his going. But obliging Reynard preferred to face the wind; and broke across our front for Hilmorton Covert—his rashness probably costing his life. Hounds were quick away—men even more so. And the old brief tale was again unfolded—as bright and sparkling as ever. Crick to Lilbourne, by way of Hilmorton Gorse and the Old Military Course—the prettiest and most perfect trifle to be found in the green Midlands. For 'tis rare scenting ground, as flat as a billiard table, and everywhere fenced as if for chasing. But the very second hedge of to-day hid a chasm under its right corner that none, I think, would have jumped had they known of its width. The Master's

example, some ten yards to the left, encouraged belief in the easy insignificance of the obstacle—and, I am told, led to six coins of varied value being paid for horsecatching in that one pasture. In and out of the old muddy lane that right-angles to the Watling-street. (The oldest reminiscence of my hunting life, by the way, goes back to a view of Charles Payn and Mr. Robt. Fellowes as they landed into that lane, all but atop of a boy on a shaggy Shetland pony.) Opposite the gorse of Hilmorton we would all gladly have ridden into the high road through the white gates apparently placed on purpose. But for some reason, unknown and regrettable, they were locked and stapled—and two lamentable holes had to be bored through the fence into the highway, while one rider who went on for a next gate was promptly hung up in a wire. *O tempora, O mores!*

On with hounds, then—past the edge of the covert, which to the relief of the Master of the pack of to-morrow, was left untouched. Five minutes' flutter, now, over the final fences and the enticing brook of the Steeplechase Course—to Mr. Muntz's Spinney. Fifteen minutes thus far; and this all the best of the run. They hunted their fox to Lilbourne Gorse and through it; got up to him at the little Clifton Coverts, and killed him in Clifton Village. 45 minutes in all.

For another they went to Kilworth Sticks—and if you, reader, have never seen men in a hurry, you should have been there, when the Pytchley field rode for Walton Thorns. They couldn't override hounds—for the latter went away with one fox while their destroyers were intent upon crowding to a gap in pursuit of another, on the opposite side of the covert. And once the bruise and turmoil of gateways was over, there was a spread of energy and a display of haste that it is impossible to realise or reproduce in the quiet moments of a non-hunting day—when the memory recalls but a dizzy struggle amid a living torrent, and relies for reminder merely upon post-blackened shins and face engraved as a gridiron. The country was wide and the country was easy. But hounds were ahead—

and that, you will allow, is more than a correct Pytchley field can stand. So we whisked through the bullfinches, while the twigs whipped sharply and the thorns imprinted their stinging kisses: we hustled over grass and we hugged over plough—till we reached Walton Holt only just too late to cut off the last tail hound, whom we had been after with all our might for at least ten minutes.

I would fain call attention to a praiseworthy custom that of late has gained much prevalence in the Midlands—viz., the practice of braiding ribbon into the tail of a kicking horse. It answers its purpose admirably, I assure you—gives your friends a hint to get out of your way, or even to make room for you, and virtually relieves you of all blame for damage done. The system is to be commended as practical, expedient, and not altogether unornamental—allowing, as it does, of some little play in colour, and of much ingenuity in fancy braiding. One day recently the new practice was very noticeable—to an extent, indeed, that proved sorely trying to ordinary nerves. At every gateway bows and festoons fluttered in terrible propinquity, in front and alongside. To move forward meant courting danger. To rein back was to invite the full force of lathy iron-shod limbs. We hurried for our turn, and we drew back to seek safety. This is scarcely a state of feeling that induces rapid progress through overcrowded loopholes and admits a Northamptonshire field to sight-seeing on equal shares! At length the situation became so embarrassing that two of the *décorés* set to work to put a stop to it. Each was garnished like a cart-horse at Islington. Of a sudden extremes met, and bow jostled bow. Crack, bang! Hocks and quarters! You might have heard the clatter in the provinces. The amazed and apologetic face of each rider was a very picture. They too let off the ready disclaimer, that each man who bestrides a kicker ought to have poised on his lips. The apologies met like shells in mid-air, exploded harmlessly—and then ensued explanation, mutual examination and doubtless two billets to Albert-gate by that night's post, "A gentleman

having no further use for him, good hunter and free with hounds, without reserve."

Another little turkey incident did I learn, as, in company with half a dozen good farmers, I smoked my way homewards from the last day's hunting in 1887. Conversation was not unnaturally of the Fox ; and so it passed on to poultry. My farmer-friends were good enough to champion Mr. Fox stoutly—averring him to be more often maligned than guilty, especially at a season of the year when cold and hunger pinch the unemployed, while many a fowl is fat. One then took up his parable—which I craved—and with permission here it is. The turkey-roost of a certain farmyard, not twenty miles from here, had been laid under contribution more than once during the recent autumn. *Of course* Reynard had been helping himself; were there not feathers scattered about?—and was not an old gobbler's head and neck found lying on the ground outside? What further proof was needed? Reynard is a roost-robber by profession, tradition, and notoriety. The farmer, though, was a sportsman, and troubled himself as little about the matter as consideration for the gude wife's feelings, and regard for his own peace of mind, would allow. He "loved a fox," he said, and "he shouldn't make any complaint." Moreover, he had taught his little girl not only to ride, but to give forth a telling view holloa that would have done credit to James Pigg. The opportunity soon came for the maiden to exhibit the accomplishment to some purpose. She had just retired to bed, when flutter and commotion were to be heard in the yard. The fox was in the turkey pen! It could be nothing else. So, flinging open the window, the little lady sent forth into the frosty night a lusty holloa that might have been heard from one end of Badby Wood to the other; and, pleased with her effort, she repeated it again and again in the same shrill key. 'Twas too dark to see; but her fox broke covert with a rumpus that

bigger and wilder beasts of the forest could scarcely have out-done. Her screams, too, attracted attention from a distance, as the same sounds might had you or I—or a keen multitude—heard them from afar, with hounds in covert. Two more foxhunting farmers were passing near, heard the sharp signal, that set their hearts beating—pounced on the fox—no, foxes, a brace of them—chopped them as they left covert, and brought them both to hand, *dark lantern and all!* Moral. Lock up your chicken-houses; and bring up your daughters to pay homage to a fox.

ATHERSTONE.

THE Atherstone marked the Rugby Carnival (Friday, Jan. 27th) in very pretty fashion, with a gallop that might serve either to rouse the wearied spirit of the midnight reveller or to hurry the pulse of the sturdiest early-to-bed foxhunter. They gave the ball-goers till midday, and a while besides, to bring their shattered remains in trim and plausible order to the covert-side. Alas for the thirst of honest riot, for the after-conscience of merry-making, for the retribution that is gathered with the grape, and for the punishment that is meted out to the scoffer-at-sleep—not a bottle of soda was to be had within a mile of the meet! Coton House was but, as it were, a whited sepulchre—a hideous mockery of Drought and Despair; silent as the grave, empty as a Marine Magnum, dry as the Great Sahara. So powerfully did this unfitness of things appeal to one of our more opulent fellow foxhunters, that he decided there and then—it should be so no more. When another January comes and the Atherstone are again at the door of Coton, pallid youth shall no longer, I warrant me, lounge limp and athirst in its saddle, but shall—well—be found fit to ride over every hound in the pack! Not but that this latter virtue was displayed with some little freedom in the earlier minutes of the run to-day; but, if I understand the symptoms, or if I took in at all accurately the

manner of man offending, its exhibition was now due neither to the dimness of sight that is consequent upon late hours nor to the false vigour of strong restoratives. It seemed to me, on the contrary, that many who, as a rule, haste not to dance nor hurry to ride, now merely seized the occasion of hounds requiring time that they might shine as delinquents in the wicked art of overriding. In plain English, there were men among hounds and round them—while the latter were flinging and straining in mad eagerness to catch the first thread of the line just cast them—who seldom if ever keep, or even attempt to keep, a good pack in view during twenty quick minutes. "The thrusters are bad enough," say the Masters (more power to them, to their gentle tongues and to their oft-tried tempers!) "but the shirkers and makebelieves are ten times worse." This is gospel, as is shown by commas inverted.

Well, you will understand, that Friday's field went rather faster than the hounds—for some few minutes at starting. The find had taken place, not at the Coton Spinneys (which, like the Coton sideboard, are possibly languishing for want of a resident tenant), but at a warm and roomy withy bed, planted in recent years by Mr. C. Marriott, by the side of Bensford Bridge on the Watling Street road. The little river Swift flows through the osiers, making it difficult for the huntsman to command both sides of his covert. To-day's fox went north (whence, by the bye, the black clouds were swooping ominously); the pack were chiefly on the southern bank; and, before the horn could be sounded on the trail, the latter had been well trodden under foot. The Atherstone ladies indeed form a beautiful pack—much like the Grafton, in make and length and shapeliness; not quite so generally matched for colour (a very minor detail), but very even in build, and very quick and vigorous and bold in work.

They hunted under difficulties for ten minutes, by which time they had reached within a few fields of the right of Twelveacres Wood; then a kindly fox jumped up before them, and they were off, over the pick of the Atherstone grass. I

cannot say whether the farmers term this Bitteswell parish feeding-land, dairy-land, or mere store keep; but for a score of years it has seemed to me that, whether beef or butter or bone be the fruit of the soil, it demands such hedging around as would guard a vineyard from without or inclose a cattle ranche within. The hedge-cutters, too, work with an eye to foxhunting. They know exactly what a hunter can accomplish; and they set their task to an inch. Four feet six is their measurement, a calculation I will back for a beaver hat (though the dents and cracks that prompt the wager are not the result of to-day). We can accept their challenge when we're going *fast*—but I am coward enough to say they are a little exacting when pace has once failed, and we quarrel for "turn." I like a gap then—no, I prefer a simple two-foot brush hedge. And I speak and confess only as one of a million. This is not a slow-going country. There are too many of us. 'Tis excellent cunning to mark a gap or a hole in the glance of a second; 'tis sheer pain and misery to ride in a string. It frightens us, and it brings our horses down to a strain of impotent plagiarism. What one does, the next does likewise—only probably worse.

But I ought to be on, in the wake of Mr. Fabling and Mr. Hipwell. You may follow the farmers here, my gay citizens. The former carved out most of the work on his short-legged chesnut; the latter, as usual, galloped faster and jumped bigger (with his steeplechase brown) than did any of the centurions (the which is local term for three-figure men). This is an era of sensational leaps, so I may be pardoned (and, moreover this is *fact*) for mentioning that Mr. Hipwell began his ride with a jump worth measuring with tape and standard.

Well, but about hounds. They set to on their fox with a will; and they gave us a short sharp treat—in a merry race to Bitteswell Village. There they knocked up against one of those scientific hedge-builders—who would have it their fox was still in his ditch, under the newly cut thorn. Hounds were at fault, while we rode all round the misguided man and

between him and them and the line. But they took it on, and we took the little brook—or fell in. And at the Lutterworth turnpike it all changed—the fox, at all events (twenty-five minutes). For, though up-wind now, they could merely hunt (which you know is a very plough-country sort of thing, especially after a Ball); and then it was we bethought ourselves of the exact size and propriety of these Bitteswell fences. So we worked our way back to the Osier Bed of Cotesbach—some three-quarters of an hour from start—and the run came to an end, I believe at an open drain or earth.

Next night came the total eclipse of the moon—and of fox-hunting.

And since Saturday another dry frost, as you have very possibly realised. The parched earth will be more waterless than ever when again we ride over it. And yet, I maintain—interruptions apart—the present has been hitherto an *excellent* season, in this section of the shires of Northampton and Warwick—showing that here at least a wet winter is no absolutely necessary condition in the interests of sport. The counties of Leicester and Rutland *want* the rain that has ever been deemed a *sine quâ non* there: and every man we meet from that side of the Midlands is emphatically crying out for it.

It occurs to me that, if on the score of scent and sport we can do without rain, we assuredly find ourselves better without it for every other reason. Such a trifle as personal comfort may be set aside without discussion. But, how *much* less mark do we put on the land, how much less damage do we inflict on the crops, how much less havoc do we play with the fences, while the ground is firm and sound as this year—compared with what happens when horses sink up to their fetlocks at every stride, and up to their hocks at a well-poached gap! A hunter now takes his fences clean, and leaves most of them in much the same state as he found them. But a tired, draggled animal—however good a performer when fresh—is jumping all the while under difficulties. He has not the physical strength

for the effort, nor does the ground help him with a firm foothold. *Then* it is that a field of horsemen make havoc; and then it is that we have a crop of blows, bangs, and big legs throughout the winter.

P.S.—My postscript is a very sad and sorrowful one. I have seen to his grave the dear old friend, the kindly director under whose mandate and sympathy it has been my privilege to sketch foxhunting for nearly a score of years. Of Mr. Walsh's life and good work it is written elsewhere. But from me a word may not be out of place in humble, affectionate tribute to the memory of one whom it was delightful to know intimately, and gratifying to see frequently. He formed opinions strongly and would express them incisively. But sincerity and consistency were stamped on every word—and the thoroughness of his kindly nature came out in every sentence. Once a friend, he was always a friend—staunch and unprejudiced, plainspoken but ever considerate. His clear judgment and knowledge of details extended to other matters beyond sport. Of whatever subject interested him he would master the why-and-wherefore; and thus, while never prosy, he spoke always with authority—never at haphazard. Misanthropes have flung their bitterness against every stage of life—dubbing youth as flippant, manhood as selfish and unreliable—while age has come in for varied epithet of detraction. But, surely, where the mind remains unimpaired—still more where, as in the case of Stonehenge, it is only strengthened and enriched by time—age is the period wherein heart and noble nature prove themselves, endearing the owner far more readily to his fellow-men than in the earlier years of existence. Mr. Walsh in his old age (and twenty years ago he was old, as ordinary men would be reckoned) was not only remarkable for his wondrous clearness of intellect, but was admirable for his kind, sympathetic heart.

HEMPLOW IN THE SNOW.

By Wednesday morning, March 7, the snow was melting with a rush—but melted only in the midfields, and still many feet deep in drifts. The lanes were like railway cuttings, every ditch was choked, and most hedges piled high. But, for all this, the Pytchley brought off a capital day's sport, of which the sketch is given below. 10.30 p.m. is the scribbling hour; and mind must not be allowed to revert to a sixteen-mile home ride, against a chilly breeze and in distress of snow-soaked boots. These have nothing to do with the sport, any more than the very needful dinner, the "sleep-enticing bottle," and the necessary cigar. I am at the beck of duty, and must obey a call. *Shuckburgh* belongs to the morning—and the cigar may go to the fire.

Crick was the meet; but Crick was not the draw. They worked to Hemplow. Stanford Hall Coverts were said to be unstopped. Fox went unexpectedly from roadside spinney on the way—and we were launched on to the Arctics forthwith. A splendid crop of snow here. But he was a kind fox, and disdained to hang up his field. So we jumped only once—can scarcely say what—from snowdrift to snowdrift, till hounds wavered on the hillside opposite Welford Gravelpit. Here they turned leftward, and ran harder—though canal path favoured, along the valley opposite South Kilworth, as if round to the Hemplows. Handy men, working or snow-ploughing or sight-seeing, held him in the valley—and, though gates were very useful and regular, the lady pack had it much their own way (Eh, what a luxury—on a Pytchley Wednesday! And didn't they make use of it, from noon till night, hunting like beagles, and leaving us all whenever occasion came?). Thus they ran, and somehow we rode, down the valley that the railway has for years considered all her own—till we touched Stanford Hall Park (thirty minutes). One, and our only one, who rides at all times and all places, really tried the fences—and even he had to cry *Peccavi* in a snow mound.

Thence across the valley to Hemplow was a simple measure and there they killed the stiff one. A right good hunt of an hour.

We had yet another hour from the Hemplow—we all saw the fox, and rode like dare-devils into the snow-flecked vale and its obvious gates, the more readily that a liveried second horseman had announced the only trap by turning a treble one over snow-covered cart ruts. (I don't think I am singular in this respect, but whenever I feel a more than ordinary aversion to taking a cropper myself—say, when like bold Reynard I am fat after a frost—it does amuse me beyond all reason to witness a little unnecessary catastrophe such as this.) Remember, we go out to be boys—and verily we are boyish indeed after a three weeks' frost. Let the old man be assumed on the morrow—or in summer. “Then why should we wait till to-morrow?” is the popular refrain of the winter—and may we ever be where foxhunting is “Queen of my heart to-night.”

'Tis getting late—the uproar of the usual Shuckburgh gale is thundering already—and I have another snow-hampered gallop to tell. This was brisker yet than the former. Such a country too! We were with them now, and again we weren't. For they ran fast, and we were, perforce, mildly cunning. They hunted over the edge of the Stanford Hall Estate. (If you doubt me, go and tick off those stone emblazonments on each corner!). We snapped hounds at a wavering moment under Yelvertoft village; and with reckless determination followed them over a six-inch hedge that stood between us and the Lilbourne road. Providence is often very good, it is said, to those *in extremis*. We will leave that for more serious case. But it was remarkable to-day that, though we (I say *we*, for nobody put us to shame more than once or twice—and then a snowdrift) could never tackle a strong Northamptonshire fence, the country came marvellously easy, save for the weight of the snow-embedded gates. Hounds ran gloriously half-way to Lilbourne village, and we made the road sound joyously. Fox made a sudden break back. Why? Because he had eaten fowls there

last week ! So explained an old friend and farmer, who should know the ways of the varmint if anyone may. Well, Reynard certainly did hurry back, like Mother Hubbard's dog from his empty cupboard : and he took the brookside back, beside the juvenile River Avon, leaving Swinford Old Covert wide. This move made jumping—and, believe me, it was very unwilling jumping. The ditches were underground. The fences (and you may be sure they were picked with every possible view to sober fragility) were best approached with free exercise of whip and spur—weapons that are as often tell-tale of nerve impaired as they are instruments of man dashing and fearless. Hounds ran hard back to Yelvertoft, and hunted to the Hemplow—reaching the nearest point to their find in exactly an hour. (I may take the liberty of adding that to handle hounds under such difficulties was of itself a feat to prove keenness, quickness, and determination beyond praise—name unnecessary.)

And this was our show day from Hemplow, March 8th, '88. I hope, ladies and gentlemen as follows, your stable report will contain no black entries to-morrow. Mr. and Mrs. Simson, Mr. and Miss Walton, Mr. and Mrs. Graham, Mr. and Miss Judkins, Major Duthie, Capt. Middleton, Count Larische, Capt. Atherton, Messrs. Hazlehurst, Adamthwaite, Leveson-Gower, Guthrie, Jamieson, C. Marriott, Stirling Stuart, Heneage, Ruddock, Bishop, M. Walton, Rhodes, Gebhardt, Hardy, Cross, Elkin, Goodman, L. Gee, J. Gee, Attenbury, Gilbert, Cooper, Smith, Johnson.

THE WARWICKSHIRE.

Thursday morning, March 8.—With five minutes in hand, with at least one boot safely mounted, with spurs and gloves ready to be snatched, and an hour's margin in which to do the eight miles, I'm safe in "assuming a virtue though I have it not," and pretending to be ready before my time. Hounds are even now on their way to Shuckburgh ; for this is the renewal of existence, the end of a brief bad dream. One horse, or ten

horses, in stable—we are all alike ready, and willing, to ride as near hounds as we dare. I have seen bright pictures—have by force of circumstances lived actually among art, doing my very best to hide my shameful love of the practical and unæsthetic by crushing out all reference to the athletic and venatic (a word I beg leave to borrow for the nonce). The ruling spirit would no doubt come out at times, with the same vulgar impromptu that forced Leech's stableboy-footman to implore the jelly mould to "who! who!!" But this by the bye—and without argument as to whether art belongs neither to killing a fox nor to riding to hounds, whether there is no poetry to be found in the open air nor romance in the grand ecstasy of a dart across country. Pshaw! we shall prove it in an hour or two—or my pen shall cease here. We are off to the island, in the soft sea of the Warwickshire grass. The bright picture to awakening eyes has been the leather clo' airing before the fire—types more or less snowy (as our valet has been dutiful or festive in the week rung out) of the ups and downs of climate, the ins and outs of Weathergage Cottage. *Vita brevis, ars longa*—which may be literally translated "As pants the heart for cooling streams." The Braunston brook is an old time receptacle for the heated in the chase, and is all ready for to-day. Now for the covert.

Thursday evening.—A magnificent day's sport—and only the usual meagre margin left me for a Thursday post. Hounds have scarcely run harder this year (the day through). If Hemplow's hill coverts gave us yesterday's sport, Shuckburgh's wooded heights did still better to-day. Meet 11.30—and consequently more people late than ever. Hounds, the lady pack—and even sharper than, while quite as shapely as, their handsome brothers. At any rate they ran right away from their field this morning—*fairly left them* (as I will show, fast as my pen can gallop for these remaining minutes). Found almost at once in Shuckburgh Wood, hunted quietly to its Prior's Marston end—and there was Reynard to be seen slipping off across the grass beneath. Lord Willoughby had

hounds on the line in a second—and lustily we raced down the bridle road that leads to Prior's Hardwick (three miles away)—and which, if we had only been content to follow it, would have kept us within hail of the pack throughout this splendid run. But to our eventual misery we didn't—and so were beaten, the fastest gallopers and the fiercest fencers, quite as much as old Pegasus the slow coach. We rode the first mile almost abreast of the flying ladies; then turned up hill as they swung leftward across us, and by so doing were condemned to hilly ground and fences girt with snow, in place of the smooth safety of the parallel road of the lower vale. They vanished over the first ridge, had gained a quarter of a mile as their nearest followers rose the second; were visible afterwards only in briefest glimpses; and finally disappeared no one knew whither. The fences were all to be jumped—but not anywhere, and not always fast. So, doubtless, they gained some vantage thus. But the sharp undulations did still more for them; and, again, I daresay they were far fitter than horses after the recent imprisonment. At the road above the brick-yard (on the Welsh road, from Prior's Marston, is it not?) they were near, by sound, but high hedges cut off the view. They were again to be seen in the next valley, streaming onward for Prior's Hardwick. And here it was (after twenty minutes of straining gallop) that men made their main mistake. Someone of the leaders supposed hounds to have turned again up hill, to the left of Prior's Hardwick. Everybody else supposed he was right, and followed him. The fact being that hounds were just in front, still racing upwind along this superb valley. A mob of miserable men meandered the village—this way and that. And hounds went on alone. Leaving Boddington Gorse to the left, they crossed the wide pastures to Wormleighton Village (a point of five miles); and on reaching "Scriven's House," at last turned down the wind and took a bee line back to Prior's Marston by way of the neighbourhood of Fern Hill Spinney. About a mile from the last-named village they were at fault in a grass field—and here they consented to be overtaken (just

one hour from breaking covert). Mr. Goodman, the second whip, and some one other had met them on their return journey—which was at a pace within horses' compass. Their upwind flight was far beyond it, as had been too plainly proved. A holloa at length enabled them to be carried on. They hunted then readily to ground close to the village; and a terrier evicted an immense fine fox, too tired to make use of the law they gave him.

Then, the afternoon run was a delightful event—and more appreciable because amenable. His Lordship again drew Shuckburgh; and from the laurels behind the house dislodged another ready traveller. Nobody, apparently, expected a find—this being the only portion of the Hill left undrawn in the forenoon: and nobody could possibly tell in which direction hounds might be breaking. In course of time we made out they had started for Flecknoe; and they favoured us (in consideration possibly of the hard treatment of the morning) by flinging back across the turnpike that we were so blindly clattering. This bend put their heads direct for Catesby; and thither they held them for the next fifteen minutes to reach the coombe of Dane Hole. Over the same description of glorious turf as in the former run, they travelled almost equally fast. A small brook crossed the line after about five minutes—a second, none too awful from the point of measurement, but very brimming with water and presently with men, immediately afterwards offered itself. It is only the Catesby stream, eventually the Braunston Brook. But snow water, when every furrow is splashing with it, is very enticing foothold to a fat and careless hunter. Well, the air was warm now, if the water was cold. The half gale of last night had moderated to a pleasant breeze—and the warm wet earth carried a rattling scent. Dane Hole has from this side an approach of two ploughed fields: and we are old enough to know that a good March fox is not likely to hang long in so small a place, with Badby Wood only a couple of miles away. So there were various half-blown horses recovering their wind on the road above, during the moments between the forward-

holloa upon the run fox and the arrival of the pack. Now the latter ran on well, and within reason, over the grassy hillsides to Badby Wood—pointing at one time to Staverton, but driven back up to the wood through their fox having met foot-people on his way. So they struck through the beech trees on the westernmost pinnacle of the wood; then at full speed crossed the Fawsley estate to Charwelton. At such a time it was no source of regret that gates should make the way easy over these beautiful grazing grounds. Close to Charwelton Church came the first and only real check (forty-five minutes). Scent then seemed to vanish: and the hunt came to an end. So must my jottings. But never again let the hypercritic scoff, or the unbeliever shrug his shoulders, at the Shuckburgh rhapsodies of Brooksby.

I should add that some twenty people went through this second run; and among them I may be allowed to make mention of Mrs. Bouch (the only lady), Sir Charles Mordaunt, Messrs. Leigh, Beatty, James, Ford, Rose, Goodman, Fabling, Jenner, Waring, Martin, Major Duthy, Capt. Atherton, and of course the Master and his man.

THE BRAUNSTON GALLOP OF THE PYTCHLEY.

OUT of your shell, my old snail! Prick up your horns, and spring to the occasion! Tell the world what you know, what you saw, and what you gathered of the Pytchley gallop from Braunston! Yes, a true, typical *grass country gallop*, of exuberant pace and plenteous incident from beginning to end—no flash-in-the-pan scurry—no slow difficult chase, by help of huntsman and pottering of pack. But a straightaway, ravishing, run—a race from find to finish, with a bold wild fox in front, a swift pack in unhalting pursuit, and the best field of the present day (I assert and repeat—and defy contradiction) toiling and striving, not one atom against another, but in sheer incompetence to be more than *after* hounds—and finally

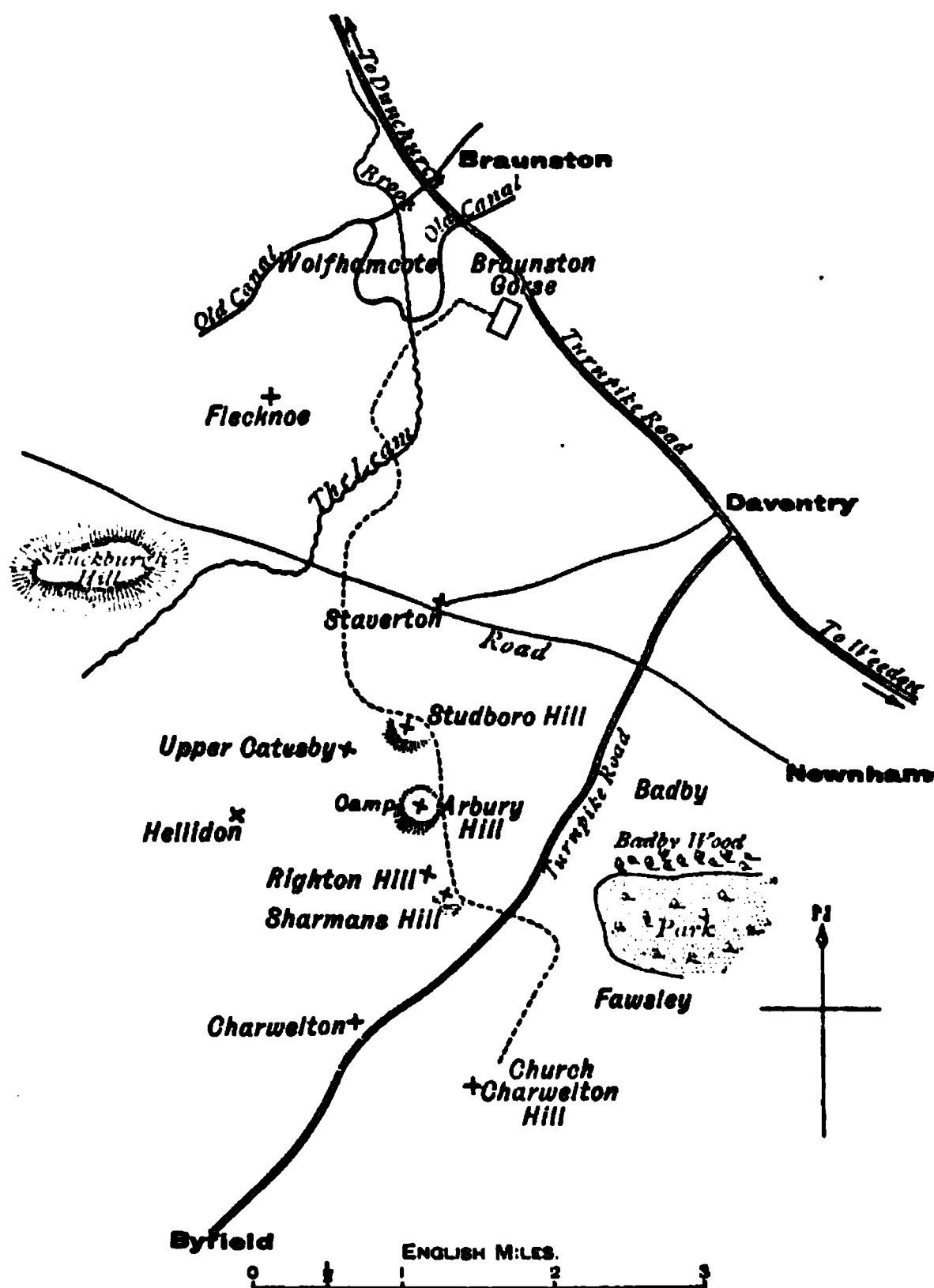
sinking astern. Let the old, old, men talk as they like. "Hounds are bred too fast," they say—"sport is spoiled and foxes can't run as they did in *our* day." Why, have we not twice in one week, seen a fox *playing* with hounds for forty-five minutes—and simply laughing at a Midland field? No, old gentleman, no! Slow off our foxes, give us Newmarket mounts (with double bridle mouths and with Liverpool talent) *then* you may hope to set things on an even footing, and we may hunt the fox in old-fashioned form! Happily, for the equilibrium of foxhunting, for balance of temperament, for method of science, for the adaptability of huntsman's skill and of master's sweet sway, such delirious rushes come to madden a field only at rare intervals. Or all steadiness would be gone, all ballast would be lost. I have ridden to hounds for more years than I can hope to ride again. But not six times in those cherished annals of the past can I look back upon a pack running with such sweet venom as on Saturday (Pytchley) and Thursday (aforetold).

Now to Braunston Gorse—I have event and movement still vivid to mind and eye. May my pen dissolve in rust if it can't evolve some tangible action out of scenes that have been my waking thoughts for two nights and shall be my memory while scent lingers in the black pad of this Braunston fox (a sniff and a solace I begged and pocketed against a sportless summer).

A yellow, bright, fellow he was, that stemmed the easy *west* wind and left the gorse behind. To-day we were privileged to line the covert's upper boundary, to peer into the inner thicket, to gaze over and beyond it upon the rich green vale beneath, and to shut off our fox from the less witching land behind us. I cannot sketch—but I can give you a trace from the Ordnance Map. It may help my words to convey their meaning, and my reader to fill in where I fail to be clear.

The Gorse, then, looks south and west—with the young Leame, or locally the Braunston Brook, marking the valley between it and Shuckburgh Hill. And straight for the brook rollicked a jovial fox, with never a glance at the cluster of

eager onlookers, who in wonder and delight watched him face the breeze as they had never dared to hope. And, though hounds caught no view, nor even hunted him from covert, they strung out to the horn as rapidly, and settled as determinedly,



MAP OF THE BRAUNSTON RUN.

as though already assured of his brush. So the two big pastures were done at racing speed: and the brook was reached, where the old canal dam bridges it helpfully. And here some stray villager turned our fox's head southward; and the lady pack crossed our front. No, not the front of quite all—for even now there were skirmishers over the embankment, while one or

two luckless others on the right flank had already become involved in the brook—"fallen," like Ossian's Fillan, "in the first of their fields; fallen without renown." Aye, and able warriors, too.

Now hounds ran the nearer bank for half a mile, then crossed it where it might be jumped, and was freely jumped—they who already found themselves on the safer side crying cheerily as they galloped by, "All right, will do capitally." To *do* is a word of elastic meaning. (In the Tommiebeg Shootings, the noun *factor* is credited to the verb *facio*.) The brook, at all events, *did* for many. How the huntsman extricated himself, and was among the first at the finish, must remain a marvel for all time. And,

"Where were ye, sweet nymphs, when the relentless deep
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?"

On the Flecknoe bank things went gaily, soon furiously. Hounds warmed to their work more hotly in every field; the fences were honest stake-and-bound, but for a while in such close succession that the instant of landing over each was also the moment for marking the next. Mr. Adamthwaite (who may fairly be stated to have held a better place than anyone, the run throughout) was pilot at this period, the running being shortly taken up by Messrs. Gordon-Cunard and Foster—and the two could be seen taking the strong fences side by side, as if the course were flagged. In the full swing of pace and excitement, and when already half way to Shuckburgh, their path was crossed and their progress checked, by a double that would have stopped an elephant and *might* have frightened even a Christ Church undergrad. High as a barrack-room, dense as a wall, there was no possibility of getting in, much less a probability of getting out of, such a rampart of thorn; and the party, now joined by Major Cosmo Little, by Mr. Sheriffe, and by Capt. Pender on his grey, pulled up for the moment in blank despair. The two latter worked off to the right, and, I fancy, hit off an eventual opening. Mr. Cunard took his

chance at the tiny spinney in the left corner; and the old black mare, landing safely in, lifted herself properly out. Mr. Adamthwaite followed; and these two had on the right a first clean cut at the brook, where fox and hounds had swung down to it from some object or individual unseen. The others, meanwhile, retraced a hundred yards at a gallop, made use of a gate they had just passed, and, catching sight almost immediately of the descending pack, also thundered after them for the brook below. Here they found it flowing muddily under a



steep sloping hill; but the banks were good and the pack tremendous—while men and horses were in the full glow of spirit fairly roused. Charles accepted the water as a mere matter of course, or as easy practice for the Staunton Brook of his next—and, 'tis to be hoped, *many* a—season to come. A cut in the bank caused General Clery to diverge a few yards for his jump: but he too went on in safety, followed by Major Duthy, and led into the next field, to join forces with the leaders of the right wing (terms and principles will be found duly explained in "Minor Tactics").* The pastures grew

* Minor Tactics, by Maj.-Gen. Clery, War Office.

wider now, but the pace no less severe. Ridge and furrow, too, was no relief—and, I might have mentioned by way of plea for steeds that early began to sob, many of those racing fences of the Flecknoe neighbourhood had a heavy drop in store, for horses jumping vigorously and landing wide. Besides, was not this to every hunter engaged, his first gallop since the frost? A shining ox rail garnished one of the last hedges before the Shuckburgh-and-Staverton road. Mr. Adamthwaite's little brown rose sharp and flippantly as the spur went in twice to the final stride; Mr. Foster chose double-timber, and left it behind him undisturbed; but Mr. Cunard's good mare only saved herself by a clever in-and-out. Her bolt was all but shot, and two minutes later her head was resting plaintively on a ditch bank. Refusal was the fate of the next comer, a heavy fall that of the next—the latter being the lot of one of the oldest members of the Hunt, Mr. Mills, who to-day was riding to hounds with all the quick talent of twenty, or, may be, of twice that number of, years ago—but who was soon back in his saddle, happy and mirthful, and going on with his son. Mrs. Dalgleish and Mrs. Graham made the oxer no easier; but Capt. Faber served it usefully. Scrambling over bank and weak double, the party left the road for the dingle-broken slopes that form the side-vale to Catesby. Did one of the above gallant officers recognise, I wonder, the first blind water-course—of which he and the black horse of to-day made no shallow survey some seasons ago and before he set off to the land of Pharaoh?

You will vote me garrulous ere I've done. But I have you by the buttonhole now, and must have out my say—craving pardon not so much of you but of the good fellows with whose names I am making free. I pretend to no completeness of story: but impressions are by no means as fleeting as the happy moments themselves, and here they are—and peopled—as they came to me.

Now men were crawling in single file over three cramped water-girt hedges marking three deep notches in the grassy

ridges—or for lack of breath and strength were riding wider for a trio of gates. Now they bore leftward over two fences that should have been “flying,” but at this period had better been termed “crashing.” And now they were on the verge of Catesby Hill. (Only twenty minutes to here, but *such* minutes!) Fox would not face hill or House, so breasted the steep hillside still more to the left. Every horse was at a walk, and many men *led up* in thoughtful—not to say forced—

humanity. And on the hill top was a first ploughed field, then the Staverton and Catesby road—and in the road a gallant Lancer walking round his steed, only to call Time ten seconds later and bid him go again to the lead of a brother-in-arms, Capt. Atherton. Another older member of the Whitecollar Hunt, Mr. Woodrooffe, was also very forward here. Then, beyond the road there frowned the tufted pinnacle of Studboro’ Hill, shutting hounds for the minute completely from view. But a sportive shepherd was on the summit, waving his cap in encouragement and advice. Some took a gate to gallop round its right base, others an equally ready means to circle its left.

The ground was again firm, now the slope was downwards, and horses recovered half their wind. Two light fences next ensued, and hounds could be readily reached. Mr. Adamthwaite at least was with them. Arbury is another ragged hill close by. Here the line crossed that of Lord Willoughby's second fox of Thursday previous (as his lordship was here to see). And from this moment the point of the present run was virtually identical with the other. Hounds gained a little on the plantation top; but Mr. Logan and Mr. Fabling were not a hundred yards behind them as they rode down a second, and final, plough to the lane beneath. Had they crossed the lane at once to the music ahead, they would, I cannot but fancy, have ridden a line of gates in direct pursuit, across the unjumpable Fawsley Lordship. But a strong party of forward riders (headed by the two whips, Mr. Goodman, Major Riddell, and Mr. Craven, I believe), galloping parallel down the wheatland, caught sight of hounds veering Fawsley-wards; and, in duty bound, held the vanguard along the bridle path in that direction. They lost not a turn, and they loitered not by the way. But the ladies were now running for blood—and beaten horses could only lose ground o'er each rolling pasture. The pack left Fawsley a quarter of a mile to the east; and their followers all that distance to the bad as they reached the spinney of Church Charwelton (36 minutes—and six miles by crow-fly). The yellow fox would have struggled another mile; but the gallopers were round before him—and he turned back among the pack to die (44 minutes to his death).

The above is but the view of one man—and of one man, among many, intent upon a task that beat them all, viz., distinctly to live with hounds from start to finish. The backs of men hurrying are not easy to decipher—though the accident of a lead at a big place, a laugh or a merry word, a groan of sympathy or a murmur of glad co-operation—any of these are signs and symptoms of common object, of joint and joyous feeling, that cannot but stamp themselves on a narrator's mind. There were quite as many others, as forward as most who

chanced to career past the penman, and so caught his view. For instance, the friend he missed in the fog of the Thornby gallop, Mr. Wroughton—Captain Fitzwilliam, Count Larische, Mr. Darby, Lord Henry Paulet, and Mr. Schwabe—also Mr. Henley, Mr. Close, Mr. Burton, Mr. and Mrs. Philips. But I dare attempt no full enumeration. I would merely venture the query to Lord Spencer and Sir Rainald Knightley (both in a position to give a verdict of to-day)—was not this almost as worthy a gallop as any in the Pytchley History?

Surely the number of hunting days has never been so small as in the winter of '87-'88—the proportion of sport perhaps never so great, in the counties of Northampton and Warwick.

THE BLUE COVERT BURST.

MORE of the Pytchley—and this in closest sequence with my last voluminous record.

It is of Saturday I would speak, the final day of this marvellous March—broken, as it has been, by frost and snow-storm, but bedecked with such sport as we have not seen for years. The Pytchley have had brilliant runs, or at least good runs, on nearly every day that weather has allowed them out of kennel. They have been fairly spoiling us. Nothing like it has happened in the Shires for five years—and, believe me, strangers, nothing of the kind is likely to happen again for another such cycle. So you need not think to cluster like bees round a honey-pot. The pot is not dry, but its contents may not be dished with the same flavour after a summer's keeping. You remember the Quorn record, the Cottesmore blaze, the Bicester furore, and the Pytchley craze—all within the last decade? And you know how these passed away for a long while. Don't come to the Grass Countries—at least unless you mean to stand a five years' trial, pay your house tax to the county, and buy your forage of the farmers. So say the sages, and so sing I the chorus.

Now you would learn of the Oxendon meet and its outcome. I wish you joy of Waterloo and its immediate surroundings—and I throw in the halo that clings to the immortalised Gorse. Jim Mason's dictum that "the best man and best horse ever foaled could not ride from Waterloo Gorse to Market Harboro' with less than three falls" has been my quotation before to-day. And the same measure is more than fairly applicable to any three miles from the same starting-point, given men and horses considerably below the great man's requirements. Such is at all events my opinion founded on recent personal experience. They contrive in this special pasture-land to put width and strength enough into their oxers alone, to send us often a mile out of our way in a run. But besides this, every valley is drained by water-course, with timber and blackthorn in a conglomerate mass to laugh at ambition and to scoff at the impertinence of riding to hounds—the which is apropos only to the byplay of the early day. We may pass over the death of four foxes—victims of fat and fecundity. And now to Blue Covert, a well-honoured centre spot in a wild grass country—the conditions of to-day being a N.E. wind (very little of it), a warm wet soil, and the lady pack fierce, intent, and undeniable, with recent and constant success.

"The leopard-fox," grey and black spotted, and unmistakable, the hero of two previous escapes, went away of himself, just as the sandwich box had been cased, the flask holstered, and now only sport-hunger and thirst-for-a-ride remained. Parade was formed in double line, as Goodall galloped hounds through to the view. Walk, trot, canter, gallop—what an orderly corps we are! And how a double plough steadies us—till we get a chance of riding in among a flock of ewes and lambs, and of scattering them across the front of hounds! We are all cattle-riders here—not born, nor taught, but impelled. The wondrous scent-power of the day was nowhere better instanced in this good gallop than when the pack drove through the bleating mob from hedge to hedge. And now we were on

great grazing pastures that your stray scribbler had never seen before—though now content to live in earnest hope of seeing many a time again. The pack was at its fastest, and so were the crowd of men—yet spread with half a mile of front, and dotting the broad acres as across the width of Fernley's old canvases. Sweeping down the gentle green slope, they covered the scene with varied action delightful to mark—for you could see right, left, and in front, to take in a spread of life and vigour seldom coloured in a single view. The pack were dotted on the farther slope, as men came twenty abreast over the ant-hilly field, culminating in the boundary hedge of the valley beneath. Messrs. Foster, Wroughton, Cunard, Pender, Sir Saville Crossley, Captain Middleton, Mr. Sheriffe, the Master and Mr. F. Langham, Messrs. Murietta, Stirling-Stuart, Schwabe, Bishop, Mills (*père et fils* 2), Sanders, and the huntsman of course, with his men; and others besides. Short Wood had been left half a mile to the right; Mawsley Wood was the prominent point, and thither hounds gained at every yard—as they will do on a burning scent where the fences are a quarter of a mile apart. Crossing the road just to the right of the wood, they proved the scent more determinedly than ever. The leading couples had a ten-length advantage in leaving the lane. The others could never touch them for a mile—though the little Pytchley ladies are as evenly paced as a coach team, and never tail nor string. And though they ran the very hedgeside, not even a road rider could live the pace with them—till they turned into the lane again, to enter Old Poor's Gorse, a rough patch of furze and common. (Twelve minutes to this point.)

The chase now left the straight line and bent back to the right (I must follow geography as closely as I can—to fix a nearly ten mile run within a five mile point—and all within a forty-seven minutes' timing). The country here was close inclosure, where the plough had been freely used. But they drove on hard to Faxton Village, hit the grass again, while the plot thickened, and we were all "well in it"—and found our-

selves at Lamport, marvelling how road and fallow could honour scent in such lively fashion. For the very first time in this incongruous season, the tillage land was soft and holding—and just when breath was badly needed (twenty-six minutes from the start). Our fox was on view as he left the corner of Lamport Spinney; but Goodall was unmoved to touch hounds in steady cry. They ran on as hotly over the dirt as they had over the greensward; and in this manner were quickly over the Brixworth and Lamport road, to plunge into the valley beneath—where the fences are double and riding must be aided by knowledge of ground. A few men took a first double in their stride. A Meltonian, Mr. Murietta, took a second with similar flippancy. Knowledge went to the left. Chance went to the right—and the latter heading had been left in sorry plight, but for Mr. Foster's exposition of a possible on-and-off at a drinking place (where bricks and mortar had encroached on the brook). There was a further alternative, I was led to believe—but as this involved a plunge into an ash spinney and a horse's head forked helplessly between the young uprights, the plan recommended itself but very slenderly to those invited. Across a quarry tramway, down to the railway side, along it nearly to Spratton Station (this the farthest point)—upwards again to Brixworth; *who-whoop!* in a timber yard. Such was the finish to as staunch and swift a hound-run as ever brought a good fox to book. You can't put it quite level with the Braunston gallop (the peer of which we shall seldom see); for it was neither so straight nor over such exceptional ground. But it was a great and grand instance of the power of hounds on a scenting day. Horses had done their best—and were in a state to do little more: and a happier—or hotter—lot of people never pulled up at a worry. If steaming horses and streaming faces be any criterion of work, surely the severity of the chase was amply and visibly proven. And now I must disentangle myself—there were ladies up, and they looked cool and collected as happiness would let them. Chief among them were Mrs. Garnett, Miss Czarikov, Mrs. Tabor, and Miss Naylor. Space I

must have, too, for an unsolicited puff. Let it be known, by all who care to save a favourite mount, and ride him to the very front—Mr. G. Cunard's famous black mare (who was well nigh to die after twenty minutes of the Braunston run) went through this gallop without a gasp or falter—*with a tube in her throat*, and never a canter for the three weeks since the operation! And his name it is Jones, the vet. of Leicester, who performed the tracheotomy. Could a better test instance have been found?

THE STAVERTON RUN.

ANOTHER grand run fell to the lot of the Pytchley on Saturday, March 24—not so straight, not so brilliant, as the Braunston gallop of a fortnight before, but a splendid performance and a glorious treat. If it had a fault, it lay in the fact that there was almost *too much* of it—as perhaps you may find ere you get to my signature. Blame me not—the tale calls for some telling. I will inflict no *map* on you this time—for that already given at page 308 will answer all purposes.

The present run was a great ring, of an hour and forty-five minutes—from Staverton Spinnies, by way of Staverton Village, Badby Wood (left untouched), Arbury Hill, Catesby, Shuckburgh, Flecknoe, Drayton Hill, Daventry Reservoir, to Whilton Lodge, with only a few slight checks throughout. This was the line (between sixteen and eighteen miles as hounds ran it and as various computations go)—it needs no eulogy from me—and here are a few particulars.

Badby Wood had been the meet—bright and picturesque in itself, pleasant and promising in the genial atmosphere of a cool quiet morning, apparently picked and granted for sport—so that we may carry foxhunting in its happiest aspect into our summer's retrospect, and into our summer's fond forecast. The Badby Wood foxes were on the rove; and we hied to Staverton, whose tight little copses—guarded the year round by Mr. Wareing and Capt. C. Fitzwilliam—were rightly deemed certainty.

The vixen was allowed an open earth ; and the round thicket, about as big as a billycock, was disturbed afoot, while the pack sat up at a distance. When allowed within, they were through in a second at the brush of a traveller. And the great mass of red, white, and black took action at once—dividing right and left, going wrong and going right. Staverton Wood o'erhung the left flank, and hounds woke its hollow precipice with liveliest music, in the cold still air. You might very easily secure a bad start—a chance, indeed, that is seldom missing when a great crowd is bent, each atom, upon besting the rest. Gates just wide enough for a shepherd's pony, hedges uncut and unbroached, a situation half grasped, and wits rather startled than awakened—a story half told, a good thing nearing its expected point—all these, or other foolery, may set a man going in the wrong direction in the first vital minutes of a gallop. For my part (and I retain the pronoun entirely for such instance of warning and absurdity) the first definite sign I could see to guide me, after an idiotic detour round the wrong side of the spinney and a crush through three gates, was a short tail wagging against the horizon—a tail that I could swear to, as cut in Harboro' and trimmed to a Leicestershire breeze—a tail that I might safely believe, a tail of truth, a stump of veracity. It even took me off the Broadway that was carrying the main torrent noisily into Staverton Village, and well-nigh took me, moreover, into a ditch while an erring gate declined to be unhasped. The tail gave a parting flick, as it disappeared in the offing ; and my venture was now endorsed and encouraged by the company of some veteran pioneers. Hounds had twisted under Staverton Wood, and were making for that of Badby. Hotly we rode, and heartily we struggled, while grass gave us every chance and the sturdy fences were yet plain sailing. So, mercifully, the stern chase was only of a few minutes. It ended, to all appearance, by prearrangement—as it may often have been, if men be believed, when The Baron exhausted a spurt with the stag. Not *our* Baron now, but a Knight of high degree—tried in field and proven in action.

How did it happen, and why? Only a strong binder—extra pace—excellent shoulders, and a knowledge of *How not* to fall—a recovery in mid-field and a return to seat and dignity that would have done credit to an Apache, and that did my graceless heart good. *Robert, toi que j'aime*. The pack lingered a moment to see it, then went on to the cold plough, and forward to a warm holloa. Over Arbury Hill—the centre, apparently, of our good border gallops of this queer mingled spring of snow-storm and high sport. Footpeople had guarded Badby Wood (an idle neighbourhood this); so we went west, and embarked upon Bicershire. (If all of that shire were thus, what need of Northampton or Warwick or Leicester?) Across a brief green plain to Dane Hole, which is the covert of Catesby. This at a good hunting pace (twenty minutes now). Through the larch dingle hounds went steadily. Beyond they threw up, ran on and again threw up, for another half minute—or where should we all have been, amid the unbridged gullies? When all were ready they drove on again, following more or less the valley of the Catesby brook: and turned up to Shuckburgh, reaching the great Hill, forty-five minutes from starting, horses blowing fiercely. But a strong fox meant no lingering here. He had dipped over the hill corner to the Napton side, and was on down the dell to Shuckburgh Village to the tune of John's scream, far before the world had got its wind on the summit. (And when next I try that lower circle on a young one, may I not be told to follow a mufti chestnut—or the gates shall be my only timber.)

Through Shuckburgh Village and out beyond, another epoch of the run began. And, mark ye, it was only from where hounds climbed the Shuckburgh Hill that we reckon an eight-mile point, yet to come! Hounds were a quarter of a mile to the good of all but the second whip, as they crossed the turnpike, and spun over the big pastures to Flecknoe. On the hill above the village is a patch of gorse that almost invariably holds a fox for the Warwickshire. The Pytchley went on harder than ever, round the hamlet, and away for Braunston Gorse. For

the present, it was a case of how soon a fox should die or how soon we should run ourselves out. The bridle road was of amazing help ; and, for that matter, after leaving Shuckburgh it was scarcely necessary to jump a fence, did you know the country and ride near the hounds. But as the bridle-path approached the Braunston Brook, hounds edged off to the right ; and some men followed them, lest the direction should now be Shuckburgh again. The brook was crossed ; and the jump was very moderate ; but the sting was out of the horses and they lurched down to the water with a dull and inelastic stride. Two refusals and a loud plunge made matters apparently hopeless, till Mr. W. Walton proffered the needed lead ; and a dozen grateful men at once got to hounds. A few fields further came the hillside spinnies of Drayton—one hour and five minutes, grass all the way till now, and pace unceasing if not exactly terrific.

The move upwards took us out of the vale, and set hounds going over the upland between the town of Daventry and the village of Welton. No fox had come to hand ; and the end seemed as far off as ever. "Too much, too much !" murmured men. "Too much, too much !" sighed the gasping horses—nearly all that had been ridden up being by this time woe-fully distressed. Happily for all, it was necessary to jump scarcely a fence after Flecknoe, if riders knew the country and made any use of their knowledge. Now, through the wire-girt neighbourhood of Daventry, hounds again improved the pace ; and reached the Reservoir—their fox to be seen leaving the farther shore as they skirted the nearer black swamp that was our portion once before in the season now fading. The roads allowed us all to plod wearily on within sight and range of the bustling pack, now working rapidly on to the left of Norton village—till every moment it seemed (as was fervently prayed) that a kill might bring the journey to an end. Within a field or so of Mr. J. A. Craven's house at Whilton Place, hounds suddenly threw up—and not all the huntsman's keen resource availed to solve the enigma. His fox *may* have lain down.

among some farm buildings adjacent; he *may* have found a rabbit-hole or a drain; or *may* have crept back into Norton Park—*may* have adopted a dozen expedients. At any rate they never hit him again—and this great unbroken run of *an hour and forty-five minutes* ended thus. Where so many good sportsmen and sportswomen rode up to hounds during the bulk of the chase, and were up at the finish, it would be a task far beyond me to venture upon names. So my sketch must stand as it is in its bare outline—for those who care to follow the details of a superb hunting run over the most perfect country. Surely hounds never worked more tenaciously and quickly than these little Pytchley ladies. Goodall, whose white-patched chestnut was probably less distressed at the end than any horse there, had scarcely occasion to touch them (once on an early plough, and once below Catesby).

I can't feel that I have adequately described this run. Of course I have taken for granted that high-class country, the charm of grass, the delight of fast hunting, are pre-understood everywhere—but especially as adaptable to such a district as that named. This was purely a fast-hunting run, covering an immense area of fine country—a hound-run not a jumping, competitive, gallop, but a foxhunt of the very best type (given the drawback of a tiring conclusion). For my humble part, I am prone to consider that the life of a run departs with the strength of a horse. Riding then becomes cruelty; and the suffering of the steed is misery to the man. To “ride a horse out” is no exhilarating exercise. It is merely a pandering to one's own vanity at the expense of the noble beast whose vigour has been a mutual glory. These are foolish sentiments, no doubt. They can't be held by a huntsman or his whips, and they are not often confessed by his followers. But men taking the chase only for pleasure, cannot but entertain them in their hearts, and would do no worse were they to give them freer vent. One of the main objections to the artificial and overstrained amusement of riding to a carted deer is found in the prolonged strain that is put upon every hunter, spurred on to

the finish of what is called "a good run"—and which may mean twenty miles' galloping. Since the above was written, it has come to my knowledge that six horses died after this great run from Staverton; and, further, I learn that our fox managed his escape by spending the night in a drain under the farm buildings above mentioned. Next morning he was seen to issue forth, weary but well, and ready, I trust, to run before hounds when another season comes round.

The alternative of the next day was Liverpool. I cannot help thinking that if any of the hard men of the Pytchley were there to see the open ditches and five-foot fences of Aintree, and to witness them flown like hurdles by twenty horses in a cluster, they will scorn more than ever our pigmy obstacles—and, in fact, Northamptonshire won't be big enough for them. As a hunting man, I make bold to say that no field of horsemen in England would have faced such fences with hounds—let them be running never so madly.

I must be pardoned for adding a scrap that has no bearing upon the day last mentioned—but a recent and somewhat awful *contretemps* that might, in the absence of due precautions, easily befall any of us—who are given to the harmless cigar. A sportsman fell (this at least was nothing unusual) and nobody paid much heed to the commonplace casualty—beyond seeing that his horse was duly caught and registered. But as the man rose, he came up, as Mephistopheles from a stage floor, not only amid odour of sulphur and brimstone, but with a tangible halo of thick blue smoke. He was known to be a sober, discreet, and accountable member of society. Spontaneous combustion could have nothing to do with the eruption, any more than D.T. could be held accountable for the frenzied vagaries he now indulged in. He cast himself on the ground, he wallowed in the mud, he rolled in the wet ditch, like a creature insane. Fetch him a "red drink" was a farmer's notion. Brandy was a friend's ready recipe. But the poor

man was deaf to suggestion, while his yells filled the frightened air. In his paroxysms he not only rent his garments, but he tore them off and trod them underfoot—an “extra superfine double-stitched scarlet, too, with silk linings and five pounds worth of extra qualities” all duly entered against him! But the smoke increased, the dense cloud rose—till he had fairly trampled the devil out of it. Then, as he resumed three parts of a cindered pink, it came to light that in a wanton moment he had harboured a box of vesuvians in his breast pocket. The fall had set them in full cry—*Hinc illæ lacrymæ*, and a parti-coloured livery, a cross as it were between the uniforms of Hanwell and Portsdown.

WESTERN CATTLE LANDS.

I.

YEAR BY YEAR do the great cattle-grazing grounds of the Far West attract a larger influx of men of birth and education from the Old Country—men, too, probably endowed with more vigour of frame than might be expected as the outcome of those refinements of life with which in England even the country gentleman is wont to surround himself. Their hopes, at all events, are large, and their capacity for labour quite on a par with their power of investment. They bear with them a sum of money that, maybe, would only suffice them for one more year's flutter on their native soil ; but upon which they intend to build, if not a fortune, at least a competency, in as few years as, they read, others have done before—then to summer abroad and winter at home, on the firm basis of a well-established and increasing herd. With these aspirations and the more confidence in themselves the better, they are in a very few days transported from the society and surroundings which make men gentle if no little fond of self, into a world as unlike their own as an English-speaking world can be. The first plunge will send a shock through their very marrowbones ; but they shake their heads and set their teeth as they rise to the surface—striking out with all the determination of men who have plunged to swim and not to drown. The older they are the more difficult the shock to meet and overcome. Youth, though thinner-skinned, rises more quickly to the surface, warms itself again readily in the sunshine of hope, and shakes off the chill ere the system is penetrated. Maturity suffers indeed where

youth is only amused ; the former groans inwardly while the latter laughs aloud. Maturity carries with it a store of sensibilities that are trodden on by everyone in the crowd in which it is mixing. Youth having just issued from school or college life, looks upon this new state merely as an exchange from partial thralldom ; has no corns to offer to the roughshod tread ; takes no offence because it feels none ; and is prepared to enjoy everything heartily. The only thing for maturity to do is of course to *harden the cuticle*, and commence the process without delay. Youth may possibly—and very pardonably—think well to adapt itself to circumstances and to men so closely, that before long it is found figuring in proud imitation. But this at all events maturity will not find itself called upon to do. Live and let live is the maxim to which the men of the West rigidly adhere ; and they no more expect a fullgrown Britisher to clothe himself in stars and stripes than they will deride what they cannot but consider the quaint eccentricities of manner and language that he brings with him. He has merely, and for his own sake, to inure himself to their ways. They neither ask him to adopt their idiosyncrasies, nor will they attempt to make him ashamed of his own. Indeed, in this latter respect they set an example that we might follow with considerable advantage in the Old Country, where a queerly-dressed or funny-looking foreigner has in every street to run amuck through gibes and grins and ill-mannered whisperings.

The social acclimatisation of the coming ranchman may in some measure commence on board his Atlantic steamer, or will at any rate begin in New York. By the time he has reached Chicago he has at least learned to make a single plate, with one knife, fork, and spoon, carry him through dinner without finding his appetite arrested ; his ears will have become more or less callous to the unceasing sounds of laborious expectoration ; while he will have come to look upon a quid of tobacco as a plaything only a little more unsightly than a Piccadilly toothpick. He will no longer think it strange that a fellow

passenger of a few minutes' acquaintance should inquire the prime cost of his watch or overcoat; and he has ceased to regard the half-breed conductor of the car as the impersonation of insolent familiarity, merely because the latter slaps him on the shoulder or settles down beside him for a good chew before answering a question as to the route. Thus the liberty and equality of a great nation will have been fairly broken to him ere he enters the brotherhood of the Far West.

On his way he has doubtless encountered more than one representative of the race of stockgrowers, and no doubt found him pleasant, sociable, and—on the vital and absorbing subject of cattle—communicative to a degree. If our friend is not foolish in his generation, he will take every advantage of this readiness of discourse to gain all the information he can on a topic of equal interest to himself, and will encourage the other to talk, the while he sets himself to digest what he hears. As a man of the world, he is likely to accept the utterances of his new acquaintance with many a grain of salt. But, in testimony to Western veracity, I may fairly say, from personal experience, that this is necessary only in a marvellously slight degree. A stockbroker on his favourite theme may be occasionally enthusiastic; but he is as a rule not only precise and clear, but intentionally truthful—*except when he wants to sell you anything.*

Then—go to the West, good reader, and learn for yourself! Still, when he is holding forth in the abstract, the stockgrower is almost invariably a lucid and reliable guide on matters pertaining to the business which has enriched him—and which has, perhaps, even allowed him the luxury of a couple of total failures on what he would term “side issues,” besides. That his views and statistics are likely to be pretty correct, is more or less assured by the close coincidence between his statements and those of his equally discursive brethren-in-stock, with whom our English friend may easily find himself in conversation. And, besides being voluble to edify and instruct the newcomer on matters pertaining to the art of stockraising, the stockgrower

is generally ready to set him on his guard against the wicked men he is about to encounter, and who—he assures him—will “stick at nothing when there’s any money to be made.” The tricks of the trade he will expose as freely and with as much gusto as if he were a detective holding forth upon crimes that he helped to bring to light—illustrating his warnings with many a tale of *smartness*. Above all, it is a thousand to one he will add, with the intensity of long and very practical experience, “Believe no man when you are doing business ; and when you trade, sir, trade always as if you were trading with a rogue, till you have proved him otherwise!”—the latter part of the advice being about on a par with that of not taking the water till you can swim, and the whole denunciation reminding our newcomer of Epaminondas and his illogical assertion that all his countrymen were liars.

Altogether the emigrant man-of-the-old-world will encounter many interesting and instructive companions on the cars that carry him towards the Pacific ; and if he makes use of his opportunities he can scarcely fail to accumulate some crumbs of knowledge to add to the store from which he means to make bread. The high opinion he has already formed of the scrupulous sense of honour possessed by his new acquaintance, may perchance be slightly shocked when he notes the uproarious delight with which the latter hails a story at the mouth of a nondescript business-man, anent the successful carrying through of a recent flour contract for the Indians, which that worthy has effected by passing off a compound of musty wheatflour and indifferent “corn” as best rations. But it is quoted forthwith that General Sheridan laid it down as an axiom that “the only good Indian is a dead Indian ;” and so he feels bound to withhold any symptom of wonderment, if he cannot quite bring himself to join in the general expression of appreciation.

So will he find the stockgrowers, or stockowners, whenever he meets them, which, after he has chosen a district for his own “location” will more often be as occasion calls him to the nearest town—for he will have but little time to leave his

ranche to cultivate the society of neighbours at long distances. Friendly, responsive, and ready at all times to lend their experience for the benefit of the newcomer, they will welcome and assist him with a general good feeling that he could scarcely find in any other community.

II.

MAN-OF-BUSINESS is, in the Western world, a generic term covering a multiplied variety of pursuits—but always, be it understood, of the pursuit of dollars. And it is in Business more than in any other relation of life that the code of social equality in vogue in America is most fully asserted and accepted. A man-of-business must have the advantage of some education, and a share of natural astuteness and method (gifts in which, it is only fair to add, few Americans are found wanting). Starting with these, it by no means follows that he should cling to any particular groove, as is customary in the Old Country. Thus a man may be a public functionary, such as county recorder, sheriff or road-surveyor one year, and the next may be

“running” an hotel or a dry goods store. A “colonel” may be found selling hardware; or a doctor of medicine dispensing timber in a lumber-yard. There is nothing *infra dig.* in selling a pound of cheese; your bootmaker and you (be you the ex-President himself) take your daily dinner at the same hotel table; and the clerk who is good enough to receive your telegram for transmission, takes care when so doing to put you thoroughly at your ease by keeping both his legs on the table, and retaining his half-eaten cigar in his mouth while tendering you his hand for a cordial shake.

The man-of-business has come West for the *summum bonum*, and he means to attain it—as honestly as the law compels him—out of you and his other fellow-men; *you* for choice, as you are possibly as yet only insufficiently versed in the tricks of the trade, and are probably still in possession of some little ready money, and of some lingering disbelief in King David’s hasty summary of all men. To get to windward of *somebody*, is his creed and avocation; and he is termed a good or bad businessman according to the measure of his success. He comes not West for the sake of his health, nor even that he may make a living (the man who could be satisfied to set up such a goal before himself, would truly earn the profoundest contempt from the American business-man)—but that he may amass a fortune compatible either with a go in for a big stake here, or with a fair start in the universal race for dollars back East.

I have spoken of the type of manhood in question as in connection with town—or as it may more likely be termed *city*—which forms the chief meeting-ground of local society. But it is not to be supposed that the Man of Business has nothing to do with the subject of live stock. In almost every case he either has, or has had, or hopes to have, an interest in some herd on the neighbouring prairies, without prejudice or interruption to his more apparent vocation at headquarters. There is accordingly nothing incongruous in the sight of an ironmonger arrayed in straps and spurs, or of a *maître d’hôtel* with a lasso hung on his saddle-bow. Cattle form as recognised a standard

of riches in Montana, Wyoming or Colorado as they do in Zululand. Wives are not ostensibly bought and sold with them, it is true; but this is probably because young ladies have not arrived in sufficient numbers to allow of a market being formed.

Matrimony, indeed, is a luxury that, with law and order, white china crockery and the extinction of game, has only recently crept in among the ranchmen of the wildest West. If a man would marry, he must journey towards the rising sun and fetch him a wife. If he is a cattleman he generally refrains from this, until he is perhaps manager of a company and able to share with her the *otium cum dignitate* of a plank-built house in "town." Otherwise, should his circumstances rise no higher than a subordinate position in a cow-ranche, his wife (though ever treated with the utmost respect and invariably yclept the "lady") will be expected to cook for the "outfit," and will probably enjoy no further comfort or privacy than is ensured by hanging up an old blanket to partition herself and husband from the rest of the apartment wherein the boys and any number of odd visitors may make their beds. The accommodation in fact coincides very closely with that provided not so many years ago for the married rank-and-file of her Britannic Majesty's Army. Not that privacy—as we of domestic England by habit hold it a necessary part of our very existence—ever appears to be considered of any substantial account hereabouts, even where the hallowing presence of fair woman has arrived on the scene. Actual coarseness or indelicacy, either in speech or behaviour, will certainly never be apparent to shock her. The language that meets her ear will be as carefully expunged as the edition of Shakespeare that bores any Brighton schoolgirl—and, indeed, instances are not wanting in which an independent "gentleman who has been working for wages" (this being the designation under which he wishes to be known, the said wages being the ordinary tariff of the Territory, to wit, forty dollars a month with board and lodging, and the work often such as a Hampshire labourer might

perform for twelve shillings a week all told)—nature's gentleman will take himself off rather than submit to such an unbearable restriction as "a fellow not feeling as if he could swear when he wanted." But Western Americans are crudely simple in their domestic habits; and their sleeping arrangements especially denote a freedom from the trammels of conventionality that should be refreshing were it not positively distasteful and uncomfortable. A man availing himself of a night's lodging at a ranche will be told off to a share of Sam Snorer's bed. If the traveller's wife be with him, they may be invited to lay out their blankets in a corner of the same room; or, at most, the wife may be invited to share the bed of the hostess, while the two husbands cast in their lot together elsewhere. Spare bedding is possibly on hand, but an extra bedstead is seldom forthcoming at a cow-rancho. As the sun rises, so do we all, and a quarter of an hour afterwards are breakfasting together. This primitive simplicity of arrangement—apart from the necessities of life in a wild country—has, I am inclined to think, its origin in two leading and almost equally indisputable facts; viz., first, that "to the pure (of heart) all things are pure;" secondly, that the custom of the country combines so very slight an amount of ablution with the toilet, that no difficulty whatever is held to prevent that little being performed in public.

The last—shall I say the lowest?—type of Western manhood is the Working-Man; and he, alas, like the mosquito of summer and the biting frost of winter, forms an unavoidable evil to be encountered by the newcomer. The latter must have his log-house built, a stable erected, a pasture fenced in, a well dug, corrals made, and a variety of minor "improvements" executed round his newly chosen home, such as, amid the comfortable surroundings of English life, he had hitherto looked upon as the indigenous outcome of the soil, but which here, as he will soon ascertain, represent—primitive of their kind though they be—a grave outpouring of capital, and, indirectly, a source of grievous uncongenial infliction. The newcomer may have been,

for all we know, the Benjamin of some Belgravian household, who has only left home because his courageous attempts to keep pace with his eldest brother have no longer found the cordial support of the paternal purse, and with whom a compromise has eventually been effected on the terms of five thousand pounds and his journey paid to the Western States of America. Hitherto his associates have been of no more mixed description than the ballot-box would admit into the best clubs in London, S.W.; while, to make the road of life travel smooth, the most respectful of menials—whether in the pay of his parent, his club, or, in the minor instances of valet and perhaps groom and second horseman, of himself—have taken all trouble off his hands, leaving him full leisure to digest the bread of idleness in society the most merry but refined. (Alas, will he not chew the cud of bitterness when realising, in the company of the godless, a full demonstration of the great truism, God made all men alike ?)

Or he may be a warrior from the proudest, but by no means the best paid, army in the world; one who, having served her Majesty faithfully in many climes, but in all cases amid the substantial luxuries of regimental life, has now realised his retirement pittance, and, in lieu of the pomp of war and jovial circumstance of military peace, has, so to speak, turned his sword into a branding-iron. By this means he intends to eke out his maturity in a manner of life more vigorous and befitting than that which he sees adopted by so many of his comrades in arms, and the sphere of which is limited by Pall Mall on the one side and Piccadilly on the other, with Duke Street as a centre. In lieu of this placid, not to say monotonous, vista, he pictures to himself years of sturdy health and prosperity, to be followed by an old age of positive affluence. His four decades of life have left him with a constitution still tolerably unimpaired in spite of hot climates and “festive evenings”—such as only a well-conducted regimental mess can offer in perfection. In accepting the provision made by Her Majesty’s councillors for his retirement to facilitate the promotion of his juniors, he

considers that he is quite capable of throwing off old associations and old habits in the same moment that he gives away his old red coat for church decoration or crow-scaring, and that he can accept a totally new life and new playfellows as easily and jubilantly as a boy changing his school. In earnest truth, no man is less likely to encounter with any sense of pleasure the ways of the West and the bearing of its inhabitants.

Throughout life—from the day he was first asked his name at Rugby, and received a wholesome correction for daring as a new boy to ask in return that of his interrogator, to the last occasion on which he marched his company past the saluting point, for approval or otherwise, of the inspecting deity in feathers—discipline has been his guiding star, and the subordination of man to man has been inculcated in him as a necessary principle in all the relations of life. He has been accustomed to courtesy on the part of superiors, and to respect from inferiors, whether in the service or out of it. Rank in the army ; station, accomplishment, and age elsewhere—these are to him tangible differences, which no amount of vulgar assurance would ever avail the snob, the scoffer, or the social communist to bridge over successfully. To these principles he has been educated, and any breach of them he has been taught to resent—especially, of course, when directed against his own status. Imagine him, then, brought on terms of the closest intimacy, of the most unsparing familiarity, with men in his own employ in menial capacities—men whose only claim to intellect is based upon their talent for chopping a log, whose accomplishments are confined to squirting tobacco juice across the floor, whose tastes soar no higher than New Orleans molasses when at work and the most fiery of whisky when at play ; whose conversation, often unintelligible through its thickly interlarded and senseless oaths, is utterly pointless when purged of the same ; whose personal cleanliness is limited to a dash of water (when not too cold) on hands and face once a day, and whose underclothing leaves not their bodies—night nor day—till absolute necessity demands that the decayed

garments be replaced by new. This is the company in which, at least till his house and premises be completed, he will have to spend day and night, probably in an old log shanty that is destitute of flooring, and consists only of a single room 12 feet by 14.

In the process of hiring these charming associates the Newcomer will have to make his inquiries in the nearest town, where he can quickly be introduced to a motley crew—ragged and hungry, probably, but by no means even conciliatory notwithstanding, whether recent arrivals in search of high wages, or old *habitués* having just drunk out the final cent of their last job. “Let me make you acquainted with this gentleman—a daisy with his axe, you bet,” says the introducer, who has probably arranged to “stand in” with the dissipated-looking individual now proffering his assistance (not his *services*, be it understood). Interrogatories as to capabilities are almost unnecessary—for the answer probably conveys little more than scorn and pity that such questions should be asked. For instance, “Has he been in the habit of putting up corrals or wire fences?” Answer, “*Some* I guess. Eh, pard?” Thus Newcomer has to accept the recommendation of the go-between, also the terms dictated, and next day sets off for the ranche with his hired mates in his wagon—nor need his patrician blood boil if he finds that before the end of their journey he is addressed only by his Christian name, abbreviated, if uncomfortably long, or likely enough adorned with some playful prefix. But, to do the Working Man justice, he usually possesses and exercises an immense power for methodical work; and will get through more, and harder, labour in a given time than men of any other nationality I have seen.

In the Far West (I am speaking now, and henceforth, more particularly of Montana, the territory most recently settled up) men when away from the towns and drinking saloons seem seldom, if ever, to be ailing; but, on the contrary, always able to put out their utmost physical strength through long hours without fatigue. If the party be large enough to warrant the

apparent extravagance of hiring a cook, at a rate that the salary of few club *chefs* in London will exceed, it will be expedient and in reality almost economical to engage one for the outfit—that breakfast may be prepared early and the other meals ready punctually at stated times. It does not follow that the gentleman who undertakes this office need be a professor of the art, nor indeed that he need have had much previous acquaintance with it. All that he is called upon to do is to be able to make sour dough bread (*i.e.*, bread, or rolls, always known as biscuits, prepared with sour dough in place of yeast), to fry bacon, and boil beans and coffee. He will not find his patrons too critical. They sit down, one and all, to eat as if it were the most disagreeable (it certainly sounds anything but a delectable) part of their daily task, race mutely against each other for a finish, then rush off to hew, to dig, or lift heavy logs the moment the last mouthful is swallowed, and the tin plate of each has been duly swobbed clean with his last remnant of bread (this final operation being quite essential to good breeding, as laid down by Western etiquette). Three times a day is the above frugal fare served up at cattle-ranches during the summer months. In the winter they periodically “kill a beef,” as they term it; and hunks of meat—first parboiled, then roasted, and finally doused with hot water before being placed on the table—are then served up *ad nauseam*. But the arrival in the country of skilful woman-kind is making a rapid improvement in the system of cooking. Her presence brings with it not only a variety of *menu* and the introduction of such novelties as potatoes, fruit pies, &c., but makes its humanising influence apparent even on The Boys themselves. Thus, as one may hear it put: “A man can’t but notice where there’s a woman about an outfit; The Boys fixes theirselves up, and the place looks that different a man wouldn’t know it.”

It must be added of the average Working Man of the West, that in his labour he displays a shrewdness and ingenuity that prove him, even if sparsely educated, to be gifted with con-

siderable readiness of resource and acquirement, such as is certainly very seldom possessed by the ordinary day labourer of the Old Country. He is scarcely ever at a loss, whatever the task to which he is called upon to set his hand. To be classed as "a good worker on a ranche" he must be at least a fair carpenter, a builder, a digger, a teamster—able to put in doors and windows, work a mowing-machine or sink a pump. If, in addition to these accomplishments, he can ride a broncho and give his help in a corral at roping or branding cattle, so much the better. But these last-named acquirements more particularly belong to the province of the cowboy, whose talents are not expected to be of so universal an order. The cowboy pretends to do little if anything except in connection with handling stock, and he—not altogether unnaturally—looks upon himself as belonging to quite a higher caste than the Working Man. Of the latter the reader will by this time have had enough—a state of satiety that in practice he will be able to reach after an astonishingly short experience, should it ever be his lot to occupy the position of employer.

The Cowboy of the West is, far more than any other section of the cattle community, a distinct outcome of its peculiar industry. Once enrolled and educated in the ranks, he assumes all the characteristics and attributes of that body; and, no matter what his former state of life may have been, would seem altogether to drop the past, to sink the future, and contentedly adopt the habits, tastes, and existence of the cowboy for all time. Not the least of his peculiarities is his dress, which is worth a word of description, and must be taken in due order from his skin outwards. Next to his natural covering he puts on warm woollen jersey and ditto drawers, when with a goodly cheque in his pocket he finds himself twice a year in the nearest town, to "burn up" his wages, in a space of time simply marvellous to Eastern understanding, considering that he has been earning forty dollars a month "with everything found." These garments he takes off occasionally when he deems that they want washing; but

under the hottest sun of summer he works away in clothing that would well protect him in midwinter. Over the drawers he wears a pair of ordinary cloth trousers, the ends of which he tucks into Wellington boots, standing upon heels of a height that would put any Parisian damsel to shame. Then he adds an outer covering to his legs in the shape of enormous "shaps," thick leather overalls, bearing a fringe down the outer seam. Spurs, with blunt rowels an inch in length and chains that jingle whenever he walks, complete the equipment of his nether man. His body he clothes further in a short shirt of coloured flannel, with wide turn-down collar of the same material and with laces fastening the front. When the weather gets colder, a loose cloth jacket is added. *En grande tenue* he will wear a small silk handkerchief of brightest possible hue—having its extreme ends tied round the neck, *above* the level of the collar, and coaxed to flutter loosely in the breeze. A soft, but heavy, round felt hat of enormous breadth of brim, light drab or dusty in colour—the shade varying according to its age—is his head-covering; the crown being bound round either with a leathern strap and buckle, or with a horsehair band curiously plaited. It will be gathered that the cowboy is in his way something of a dandy, and loves to maintain his calling by means of due attention to all items of class adornment.

His saddle and trappings are, still more than his clothes, a happy combination between the requirements of rough service and those of fanciful ornamentation. The pommel of his saddle rises in a horn before him, and answers the purpose of, as it were, a post to which to affix the end of his lariat (or lasso) when he has "roped" a horse or cow; besides at other times coming in useful in various ways as a means of carrying sundries. The cantle also turns up high behind him, and he is thus wedged in a seat that should be secure against the "pitching" of any "broncho" or half-tamed horse. His stirrups are broad of make, and are built of wood (*far* warmer, by the bye, than our English hunting stirrups); and suspended

on each side of these are great leather flaps or "tapideros," to protect his feet from cold and from the sagebush through which he is constantly galloping. The body of the saddle stretches back behind the cantle and serves to support the oilskin "slicker" or loose overcoat, without which he never moves forth—any more than he would dispense with gloves, or leave behind the enormous six-shooter that he wears half-concealed beneath his right skirt. Under his saddle are folded a pair of blankets, which protect his horse's back by day and form his own bed by night. (And here it may not be out of place to insert a parenthesis, to the effect that the only certain preventive of sore backs in a hilly country is a carefully folded blanket under the saddle. I give this as the result of experiments in many climes and countries—and I venture to offer it now especially to my fellow-sportsmen of Exmoor Forest.)

A cowboy has at his command seldom less than half a dozen horses, or even more during the progress of the spring and autumn "round-ups"—a necessity which will be easily understood when it is borne in mind that his mounts are too often mere ponies, weighing, it is calculated, not more than four times as much as the sum total attained by himself, his spurs, his six-shooter, tapideros, saddle, and impedimenta generally; for a cowboy, equipped for the field, probably bears about with him all that he possesses in the world, unless it be a "satchel" (as a handbag of whatever bulk is termed in American parlance), which he has left in the nearest town, and which may contain his eastern suit of clothes and photographs of the old folks at home. The work that each horse in turn is called upon to perform, though it may extend over only half a day, is generally quite sufficient to entitle him to three days' rest, especially as during that time his only food is prairie grass, which may or may not be at hand in any quantity. Each year, however, it should be added, is a more general disposition shown in favour of the stronger horses of Oregon and Washington, large importations of which have been brought across the

Rocky Mountains ; and Montana now promises to be the finest horsebreeding section of the American Continent.

A cowboy, unlike a poet, becomes so by force of circumstances—is not born to the trade. His birth may date back to some abode of wealth in New York, to a log hut in Colorado or Wyoming, to a granger's farmstead in Missouri, or even to some aristocratic home in England. But a man's past history has nothing to do with his status here, and will have little or no bearing upon his cowboy life. If he has once joined that cheery, devil-may-care fraternity, he will probably do as the rest—viz., work and ride like a tiger when necessary on a teetotal diet, then off to town to burn up his earnings as quickly as whisky and the spirit of devilment can prompt him. Varied as his origin, so of course is the disposition of the cowboy ; but, taking the majority to prove the rule, you will find him almost invariably a genial, warm-hearted comrade, ready of help and ungrudging of trouble. And to none does he evince the good qualities of his disposition more readily than to the newcomer, to whom he is never by any chance churlish or unfriendly. His life is necessarily a vigorous rather than an intellectual one ; as a very slight acquaintance with the social intercourse and style of converse in vogue among an outfit of cowboys living alone at a cow-ranche will suffice to demonstrate. Nor can it be said that either their employers or they themselves make much effort towards providing desirable food for the soul of the cowboy during those long months when he must spend much of his time within doors. On the contrary, the fare in this direction is quite as crude, scarcely as wholesome, and certainly not as plentiful as is forthcoming for his bodily wants. Two or three old numbers of the *Police News*, as many dog-eared and half-destroyed novels, and perhaps the illustrated catalogue of a dry goods store, form scarcely a feast of literature, to last half a dozen men through a whole winter. With these scanty advantages and no communion whatever with the outer world for so prolonged a period, it is scarcely to be wondered at that

narrative, discussion, and repartee in a cow-ranche are, to put it mildly, more pronounced than brilliant. It is certainly not among a bevy of his intimate acquaintances that you would credit a cowboy with the better side of his nature. Take him separately, and his good qualities seldom fail to discover themselves. Indeed, the chances are that ere long you will come to the conclusion that the genus cowboy is by no means the least favourable type of Western life. *He* at least is not devoured by the all-absorbing fever for money-making. He likes well enough to make it, it is true; but only, sailor like, that he may spend it. The rest of the mass of men with whom the newcomer is likely to come in contact worship the almighty dollar with a fervour in which their whole soul is wrapped, look upon its possession as the *summum bonum* of life and as the chief claim to worthiness, make its attainment their every thought by day, lend to their idol such scanty time as they can afford for dreaming by night, and crave after it madly—for what?—that they may have it to make it a basis for earning more.

III.

IF you would see the prairie wearing its happiest aspect, you should be on it in the months of May or June, the period in which the cowboys do most of their work—when Nature is at her greenest and freshest, and before the sun has withered the grass or parched the soil. “Young man, go West!” have shouted the railway companies for years past, beguiling thousands of hapless youths to embark upon a career for which neither by education nor physique are they in any degree fitted. “Young man, go East,” is their motto and wail till opportunity shall take them back, sadder, wiser, and no richer for the hardships and disappointments of the vaunted El Dorado. But in early summer, the great prairies that still remain for the sole use of cattlemen and horsemen are not only picturesque but offer to those whose work is upon them a

vigorous, healthful, life that has few drawbacks. The air is then exhilarating beyond measure, the sun is only pleasant, and saddle-work and corral-work alike, are for a brief while, recreation rather than toil. This will not last, you know. Another side of the picture comes shortly afterward—dusty corrals, crushing heat, torturing thirst, alkali water (more yellow and muddy day by day), swarms of flies and clouds of mosquitoes, ceaseless toil and broken sleep.

A few years ago the cry went up—and a very bitter cry too—that stock-raising in the West, especially in Montana and Wyoming, was “played out.” So it virtually was as regards growing-herds and cattle-increase. Like so many things in America, it had been over-boomed and overdone. The mania had developed with such intensity that the acquirement of a few head of cattle was looked upon as a first safe step to fortune. The prairies were soon asked to carry ten times as many cattle as they could support. Two summers of drought and two winters of unexampled severity stepped in to check the mad delusion, and effectually put an end to it by striking off nearly every cow and calf that ran at large.

But under a different system the cattle-men—or rather cattle companies, for single individuals and “little men” have perforce abandoned the game that has in most cases already cost them their all—the companies and new venturers again came to the front, driving in accumulated herds of young steers (yearlings and two-year-olds) from the Eastern and Southern States to grow and fatten on the rich grasses of the prairie. Should the system prove profitable, depend upon it that every man in the West will want to have a finger in the golden pie—till this venture too is choked by its own popularity.

Meanwhile the Western towns—cities of the dead they might almost be termed for the last few years—are looking forward to a revival that, it is hoped, may be steady and permanent. The bustle, the business, the activity have gone out of them; but much latent vigour and no little self-confidence remain, and they await the future hopefully. True, the saloon-keepers are

thinned out ; the galloping cowboy more seldom requires the attention of the sheriff ; and revelry and pistol practice scarcely ever break in upon the stillness of night. But the higher-class citizens stand manfully by their ship, put a good face on the passing depression, deck their stores no less temptingly, and dress themselves more sprucely than ever. There is a good time coming ; and they mean to hold on for it.

Very law-abiding and quiet are these narrowed communities. They bring their little differences peacefully into well-constituted courts with apparent relish—gratified no doubt by the knowledge that for the benefit of society they are breaking the terrible monotony of eventless existence, pleased possibly that they can still do something to keep their lawyers alive, and secure in the fact that in a colony so closely woven and so limited it is impossible that any enlightened jury shall be constituted so as to contain not one staunch friend reliable to the end. And as in case of litigation the county has to dip her hand into her impoverished pocket for the bulk of the costs incurred, it follows that legal proceedings are a favourite and not necessarily too-expensive a luxury for individuals indulging.

Thus litigation generally ends in smoke and is consumed in argument, that, however logical and convincing to the un-biassed listener, is, to say the least, a waste of energy as far as the twelve are concerned—these being quite capable of making up their minds on the case at issue without such extraneous assistance as may be offered by mere evidence and argument. Rely upon it, the scales of justice in a small community were never meant to be handled by twelve men at one time—at all events in Western America. Is not Justice invariably portrayed as single-handed, and moreover blindfolded among her neighbours ? Even in criminal cases, a verdict is very rare. Judge Lynch would hang ten villains where one is now passed to the penitentiary at the bidding of constitutional procedure. But Judge Lynch seldom goes into court for nothing. He is at least prompt, and in all probability no more inaccurate than the machinery that has taken his place. For a long time he was

and even now occasionally is, obliged to work alongside and assist, after the other has been ostensibly in full possession. It would take many volumes to recount half the stories of Judge Lynch's vigorous and effective action, even as instanced within the present decade. But here is a tolerably recent one connected with the mining camps, that is very illustrative of his code and its methods of enforcement.

A Mexican desperado had come under sentence. The Vigilantes had decreed his arrest, and he was to be brought before Judge Lynch for summary trial. A detachment accordingly waited upon him at his log shanty in a neighbouring gulch, and bade him surrender. His only answer was to shoot the spokesman dead, and to open fire upon the others with his Winchester repeater. In return volley after volley was poured upon the hut. But the Mexican had the best of it behind the thick logs, and soon placed two more of the delegates *hors de combat*. Compelled to attain his capture or destruction by other means, they now brought into play a large mortar that happened to be available: and cramming it with stones, pieces of iron, and anything that came to hand, fired it with blasting powder again and again against the wooden citadel. At length they succeeded in blowing in one whole side of the hut; resistance appeared to be at an end; and, after making sure with another volley or two, they advanced with due caution to the ruins. Here they found the wretched man—his ammunition exhausted and one of his legs broken. But justice had to be accomplished—and none the less because exasperated and defied. The man was a murderous ruffian who had killed to rob: and they had to stamp him out. So they hung him forthwith to the nearest tree; then, as soon as he was dead, cast him on the shanty roof, and set fire to the pile.

Now comes the last detail of the tragedy. It was rumoured in camp that the Mexican had gold upon him when thus executed. Whereupon the women—such as alone frequent a mining-camp—came down upon the scene of cremation; and as soon as the fire was dead, set to work to pan out (*i.e.*, to wash

and sift) the ashes of the corpse, in vain quest of the rumoured gold !

Here is another instance :—

Virginia City—now a well-organised centre of mining wealth in a Western Territory—was only in its golden infancy then. Its inhabitants up to a certain day of which we shall tell were lively exemplars of the theory that no impetus works so violently towards the commission of crime as the greed begotten of wealth dug from the ground. Placer-mining has probably been linked more closely with blood and robbery than any occupation in the world save freebooting on the high seas. The turning up of solid gold—money at once, for is not the yellow ore as good as the very coin of the realm?—would seem to have an effect on the instincts of man that no other appeal to his grosser and wickeder senses can equal. Small wonder then that, without the restraining influence of either laws or penalties, evil comes madly to the surface, and a community is terrorised and outraged till it can stand it no longer, but rises to put things straight with a strong and merciless hand.

In such a society as that of a young mining-camp will be found every class of character, every grade of intellect, and every form of manhood. The more sterling spirits are sure to come to the front ; and from their initiative grows up the steadier future that shall develop the lawless camp into the prosperous city. Colonel Sanders was one of these men. A lawyer by education, he had, like most others, become a soldier by force of circumstances, and when the war of brotherhood was over, he, too, like the others, turned again to civil occupation. But the campaign had unfitted him for an immediate return to office drudgery. Love of excitement and the habit of outdoor life bade him off to the mines ; and forthwith he found himself shoulder to shoulder with a rough and motley crew—all digging, washing, and sifting the soil for very life. On the outskirts of the workers hung a still “tougher” element—gangs and individuals who, while ostensibly turning the earth for themselves, made their chief business the jumping of others’ claims, the

“holding up” of men carrying their gold to a distance, and, in fact, the obtaining forcible possession of what belonged to others, even if the six-shooter or the repeating rifle had to be the medium of acquirement.

It so happened that, as the almost daily record of crime rose to its fullest pitch, one of the leading syndicates fitted out a well-tried teamster to do their “hauling,” with a high-priced mule-team and wagon and with harness in keeping. Dave the Dutchman was claimed to be able to hold his own on the road with most men. But Dave disappeared in his first trip; and neither mules nor wagon could be heard of, till at length it was rumoured they had been sold within the territory by someone other than Dave. That there had been foul play was soon afterwards curiously confirmed. A traveller chanced to shoot a grouse by the roadside, and the bird fell actually on the body—of Dave, in the bush! A bullet had gone through him; and a lariat from a saddle-pommel had served to drag him out of sight of passers-by. Suspicion, and eventually certainty, pointed to one Ives, a ruffian who had long defied and outraged such law as had been extemporised. But the blood of the camp was now up. A dozen bold fellows volunteered as sheriffs: and strong hands were laid upon Ives, when a row of gleaming guns had shown him that resistance was no use. A jury of miners was summoned, a judge elected, and the trial fixed for next day. Colonel Sanders was sent for from Banner, the neighbouring camp, and rode in to take the part of attorney for the prosecution. Ives’s special gang were as wealthy as they were determined. They too knew of the Colonel’s reputation; and had the strongest belief in the efficacy of a practised advocate. So they too had sent their messenger to Banner, and when Sanders appeared they hailed him as coming to succour their partner. “Ten thousand dollars in gold, Colonel, when you’ve pulled him through,” they shouted. But the Colonel was one of those whose minds were made up that a stop should be put to the savagery of the district—and, moreover, was one who feared neither “bad

man" nor devil. "No," he answered firmly, "you have not money enough in camp to buy me. I'm for the prosecution—and hang him they shall." "We'll shoot you then!" went forth from a score of ruffianly throats—and a score of hands went to their waist-belts. "Shoot me—not you!" retorted the Colonel; "you haven't guns enough in camp to do it." And looking steadily in their faces, not a muzzle went up. He then rode coolly off. Their next move was to send a heavy bribe to the sheriff that another jury should be packed and substituted. But the sheriff, though amenable enough to the influence of gold, knew better than to tamper with the body of citizens now roused to white heat in defence of their newly constituted tribunal. They meant to have everything in order. Judge Steel should direct the jury; and the prisoner might have the services of Judge Smith (another judge so called, for the denomination clings to every individual who has once been called upon to dispense justice, however crudely).

So Ives was tried; found guilty of murder; and Judge Steel passed sentence of death. Up rose Colonel Sanders; and turning from the judge and jury to the assembled crowd, shouted, "And now for the verdict of the people! I move that this sentence be carried into effect within one hour, and that the prisoner be hanged by the neck till he is dead before the people!" A storm of acclamation carried the motion—while the assentors brought their right hands on their pistols and formed front against the cluster of dissentients, who had moved up with a view to rescue. In vain argued the counsel for defence, "Surely no prisoner may be taken to death within an hour of verdict and sentence." The reply came promptly from the mouth of Boedler, the head of the Vigilantes—one whose experience might fill volumes with episodes more thrilling than Dumas, Poe, or Rider Haggard ever dreamed of. "Did he give the Dutchman an hour?" "No, no," shouted the excited miners. "String him up! Bring a rope!" And moving with his audience, Sanders again jumped upon a cask to be heard. "I now move," he cried, "that this sentence of the people be

carried out *at once!*" Aye has it—and Ives is doomed. A half-finished loghouse stood alongside. Thither they dragged him, strung his own lariat round his throat (probably the same raw hide by which he had hauled his victim out of view), and



within five minutes the ruffian was choking out his life's breath against a rafter beam. Twenty-four hours were given Judge Smith to quit the country: and from that day was inaugurated a new era in the prosperity, as also in the jurisprudence, of Virginia City.

A species of rough chivalry is not the least worthy motive which will rouse a western mob to take the law into its own hands—often without waiting for deliberation. It is not so many years since a young Englishman was within an ace of falling a victim to a sentiment of this kind unduly roused. Happening to call upon a married woman of his acquaintance, he was told by her younger sister that she would be returning home shortly, and was invited in to wait—some wine being produced for his refreshment. The young lady drank a glass

and was promptly seized with a fit, very much to her guest's dismay. He called in assistance and left her duly cared for. A report, started maliciously or idly, went round the little town to the effect that the girl had been ill-treated—and the occasion, happening at a time when one or two unpleasant cases had already roused high feeling, was not to be left unheeded. In short, in course of the evening, the young fellow found himself surrounded and seized by an angry mob, already armed with a rope, and with every intention of making short work of him. In vain he asserted innocence and requested a fair trial. No, nothing would do, but the girl's honour must be avenged and prompt justice enforced. Pulling himself together with a strong effort, he at last obtained a hearing, and made his words tell, "Look here, men, I'm no coward, and I'm not afraid to die. Take me before the girl—and if she says I ever insulted her by word or deed, do what you like with me!" For a moment it looked as if they would not listen even to this: and the leader of the party even gave the word to "bring him along to the tree"—till one of the roughest of his captors spoke up to the boss, "Bill, I'll be no party to a job of this kind. Bring him before the girl and let her clear him, or hang him." The tide turned, and fairplay carried the day. The young Englishman, surrounded by his accusers, was taken directly to the woman herself. "Why, certainly No—Not by a word!" was her answer as to whether "this man had attacked or insulted her." "Well, pardner, I guess we'll just loose you. Let's liquor!" And with these words the Englishman was free. But after this adventure he cared little for his adopted home, and put a speedy end to his residence in a city wherein the forms of jurisdiction were so dangerously primitive.

HUNTING A CHRISTMAS DINNER.

THE winter of 1884-85 may have been exceptionally mild and open in England, but it was very far otherwise in Montana, the climate of which is as variable and fond of extremes as that of North China, where the sea freezes over for months, though the heat of summer is intense.

The winter in question settled steadily down as December came on, and maintained itself through January and February with an awful and bitter severity, very trying to the new arrival in the Territory. It then suddenly broke up, and dissolved—almost in a day—into warmth and spring. But for those three months the thermometer ranged nightly between 25° and 55° *below zero*. In the daytime a bright sunshine would often warm the air to an extent that allowed one to throw off a greatcoat, or even to wield an axe without a coat at all. When, however, the sky was gloomy, and the hoar-frost drifted on the breeze, the cold even at midday was so intense as to be almost unbearable, though feet were equipped in heavy “German socks” and over-shoes, hands encased in mittens, and ears, nose, and cheeks protected by silk kerchiefs. Even thus the cold would penetrate to one weak point or another, and nothing but hasty and violent exercise, often amounting in itself to absolute torture, would avail to ward off pronounced frost-bite. Let the discomfort and pain be what it might, it would then be absolutely necessary to dismount and run, or waddle, by your horse’s side—the whole time keeping the disengaged arm banging on the body, and thus sustaining some degree of circulation.

Christmas Eve (1884) was preceded by such a day—fully 40°

below zero, and with the frozen fog drifting sharply over the snow-covered prairie. I had arranged to ride up to my "Cow-camp" (where I had some thoroughbred shorthorns wintering under the lea of the pine-hills of the upper ground), and to devote Christmas Eve to an attempt at procuring fresh meat for the next day's dinner. For the pine-hills in question, overlooking Powder River, were still the resort of some few white-tail and black-tail deer, the remnants of the game that only a very few years before had swarmed over these prairies. For the valleys of Powder River and the Yellowstone were, with that of the Big Horn and the Upper Missouri, the range of the buffalo as late even as 1880; and the heads and hides of the last few old bulls (the skins too worthless to strip off) dotted the prairie as recently as 1884. A few elk were *said* to be still inhabiting the cotton woods alongside the bed of Powder River, but I could not hear of any one having shot an elk for some two years before the date of my story. Game of every kind had in fact been virtually exterminated by the hide-hunters, who made Miles City their head-quarters and their pandemonium during the summer months—flinging away in ignoble debauchery the dollars that they had earned with no little hardship during the winter, and that their wagon-loads of skins had readily furnished them on their return in the spring.

Miles City, before the cattle trade had made such progress—peopling the ranges with tamer herds and making the town at once a commercial centre—was nothing more than a great hunting dépôt, lively and uproarious during the summer months and almost closing its doors during the winter.

But this belongs to the past. The present, *i.e.*, December, 1884, is represented for the purpose of my tale by two stock-men, bent on procuring something more edible than bacon, and with this end in view facing as cold and comfortless a day as ever men selected for a ten-mile ride. The trail up the creek—at the head of which lay the log-hut for which they were bound—was no longer marked in the snow; for the restless herds (with a few hardy exceptions still clinging to the hills)

had moved down the wind to some sheltered nooks, and the snowfall of last night had deepened the earth's covering to a depth in some places of eight inches—about the utmost it often attains in Eastern Montana. Riding under such circumstances as already depicted is anything but a cheerful recreation, and its disagreeables were now enhanced by the difficulty of following the path, which dipped here and there into deep cross-gulches (or ravines), winding its way up again by means of stairlike ascents, and followed a slippery track, with an almost certain fall awaiting any mistake on the horse's part. But these little animals (we always ride the ponies on such expeditions) were too well awake to their own danger to be careless. Now and then their unshod feet would slip nearly from under them; but an actual fall on their part is happily a rarity. The frozen ground (even with the cushion of snow to break the contact) is but a comfortless bed on which to land; but, as far as my experience goes, a horse will seldom lose his legs in travelling over it, unless hapless chance bids him tread on solid ice, such as he might encounter in crossing some little creek.

About noon we came upon a little bunch of about thirty head of my brood-mares and foals, which with their attendant stallion (a young Shire horse that I had brought over from England) I was anxious to see, and to assure myself of their welfare. Riding into their midst (for even prairie horses are tame enough while the snow is on the ground), we essayed to stand and look over them; but so intense was the cold that one moment's waiting was sufficient proof of the probability of freezing should we remain longer. In a few seconds we had thrown a glance over the stallion, and identified one or two of the nearest mares; then, bundling from the saddle, we rubbed our noses and ears frantically with mittened hands, and pursued our jumbling way at the best pace our numbed feet would allow alongside the saddle-horses.

Arriving at length at the Cow-camp, a view-halloo brought its occupants to the door, and a cloud of hot steam rushed forth in our faces. One of its inmates led off our horses, and the

other hurried on the crude meal for which we were happily in time ; while we threw off our outer encasements and shunned the hot stove as we gradually thawed out. My nose had a white tip to it, and my companion Bronson's ears were almost transparent ; but a handful of snow from outside set them all tingling again, and they gave no further trouble beyond a slight burning sensation during the ensuing night, and an uncomfortable tendency to freeze again on the scantiest provocation.

Bacon, bread, and coffee—all of the hottest, and in enormous quantities—having been duly consumed according to the custom of the country, *i.e.*, at railway speed, and with a greedy indifference on the part of each individual to all else except satisfying his own hunger as quickly as his neighbour is doing, conversation and tobacco had a chance, and the news of the two ranches was compared, chiefly in reference to live and dead stock. Then it became necessary from Bronson and self to wrap up our features once more, examine our rifles, and again to sally forth—this time on foot. Clarke averred that he had constantly moved black-tailed deer from a willow-banked gulch only a couple of miles away, but that “they had jumped about so he could never hit them ;” and thither we scrambled along, the severe exercise keeping our blood in a warm glow. Peering into every likely nook, and plunging through countless drifts, we had pretty well tired ourselves out before arriving at the end of the gulch and turning our dragging steps homewards. A last bend, containing a few trees and some undergrowth, alone remained, when an exclamation from Bronson (couched in the vivid language of Western wrath) called my attention, and in another moment I saw his Winchester go off in the air, as if he were taking part in firing a *feu de joie*. To the sound of his shot a fat black-tail doe leaped from the bushes below me, and for several seconds stood broadside on, offering a beautiful shot at twenty yards' distance.

Now was my time, and, of course, my thumb quickly sought the hammer of my express to raise it to full cock. The devil a bit would it move, right hammer or left ! The piercing cold

had seized upon the oil in the locks, and frozen them tight ! The same thing, or nearly so, had happened to Bronson's weapon—the tumbler refusing to hold the lock at full-cock, and hence the explosion. Hence, too, that fat deer bounded off into the distance ; and surely two sadder men than Bronson and self never trudged home to bacon and bread.

But we “got it all back,” as the Western phrase goes, the next day—Christmas Eve. Breakfasting at daylight, we saddled up immediately afterwards, wrapped a warm piece of blanket round our rifle-locks, and set off once more, with desperate resolve to return not without that acme of luxury, *fresh meat*. Reward came sooner and in better shape than our most boisterous hopes could have suggested.

For half a mile we jogged the bed of the cooly (another name for the usually dry watercourses of the country) ; then emerged on to a stretch of open grass, which had served us for meadow during the hay season.

It is needless to say that ranchemen in the habit of searching stock do not go about with their eyes shut. When their eyesight, as in our case, is sharpened by a craving for food, you may “bet”—again to borrow their parlance—that any living thing to escape their view must be not only very small, but still.

A mile away there was a something—a big animal plainly feeding—a steer, probably. Up went its head as the glasses were brought to bear, and the long arched neck, even at that distance through the thick frosty air, surely proclaimed a deer. That it loomed so big was surely due to the foggy atmosphere. A deer of some kind it certainly was ; and we snapped our glasses and smacked our lips in premature enjoyment of the Christmas dinner in store. As luck would have it (and luck was all through in our favour to-day) the ravine in its course led right up to where the game was working its food from out the snow, and the wind was right, too. So, following the creek bottom, we kept the saddle for three parts of the journey, and then descended for a stalk. Tying each pony with his head

bent half round to the near stirrup (a position, mark, which will secure any horse to the spot you leave him), we left them in the ravine, and hurried along it to a point that should, we had noted, bring us almost within range. After a moment to regain wind (anxiety and meat-hunger combining with the quick movement to render a recovery of breath a matter of difficulty) we peeped cautiously over the bank. Not a sign of our game—already in fancy half eaten! Ye gods, it was all too dreadful! No notice of our approach could have scared him, for the wind blew right in our faces, and our movements had been absolutely noiseless in the snow. Shuffling towards the spot where we felt confident we had seen him feeding, we searched in vain for track or sign of deer. A hoofmark, that to all appearance belonged to a two-year old steer or heifer, was visible and recent, but no trace of buck or doe. The whole thing seemed uncanny. We had sighted no cattle; but on the other hand we could stake our existence that that long neck seen from a distance belonged to a deer, and only to a deer. Bronson gave it up, and strode back for the horses, while I wandered up and down in perplexity and disappointment, looking again at the large deep imprints in the snow, and hunting vainly for a smaller trail.

Holloa! by all that's holy, the beast has been *pawing*! No cow ever got at her food through snow by means of her foot!

"Hi, Bronson!" (who came up at that moment) "it's an *elk*!"

"*Elk! not much!*" replied Bronson, laconically; "there ain't no elk within a hundred miles."

"Well, what else could have been pawing to feed?" I argued—and the answer burst upon our sight as the words came from my lips. Between two and three hundred yards away a pair of enormous ears sprung up over the edge of the gulch, and for several seconds quivered over the bank, while we crouched motionless beside our horses. Up now rose a graceful head, then a supple neck (carrying a thick heavy mane almost as pronounced as that of an African lion), and

soon the giant body of the finest of all deer, and perhaps of all *meat* (for were we not altogether pot-hunters to-day?), issued to view.

"Take her with your heavy rifle as she stands," whispered Bronson, as he again strove in vain to set his frozen Winchester ready for action.

"Buck-fever" is a malady from which I as well as others cannot claim to be on every occasion free; and buck-fever, I assure you, is only too liable to assume an aggravated form when the thermometer is ranging 30° or 40° below zero. So it was due, either to a sudden seizure of the complaint or to some mistake as to distance, that my first bullet merely kicked the snow up under her legs, while the left barrel, with the sight at three hundred yards, only answered the purpose of breaking her near hind below the hock. (A cow-elk, you will already have realised; but even a cow-elk was on the Mispah as rare a bird as the blackest of swans—and then the amount of *meat*!)

"That's done her!" cried Bronson, as he pinged another bullet in her direction, slipping the hammer from his thumb; then, leaping to his saddle, set forth to head her round.

I was to stand where I was, while he accomplished his apparently easy task with the wounded beast. So for a minute or two I stood till I saw the elk (at last realising whence her pain and danger came) making very rapid tracks up the hill, round which my companion had disappeared. Then I, too, sought saddle and pursuit—to ride a harder chase than I had ever ridden from Ranksboro' or Melton Spinney.

The three-legged giant had much the pace of my Indian pony, though the latter had won many a "six-hundred yards" match among the cowboys; and as she vanished over the brow I felt that the betting was at least a *shade* of odds in her favour.

The prairie here was excellent going—for miles free from sage-bush, and broken only by an occasional easy creek-bed. Snow to the depth of half-a-dozen inches covered the whole of

the undulating landscape, which was fringed along the horizon by the pine-trees of the upper hills, some five or six miles away, and these it was certain my Christmas dinner would do her utmost to reach.

Up the hill-side I could only move slowly, following the well-marked trail left by the elk, and which was rendered more conspicuous still by the blood drops freely scattered on the snow. Rising over the ridge, I found Bronson coming round from the right, now just upon a level with me, riding hard, and gesticulating towards the front. A broad sweep of sloping prairie lay before, stretching down to a creek-bed, which appeared to lead direct to the pine-hills; and along its bottom, fully half a mile away, the great elk was to be seen, making tremendous play towards the sanctuary. Plainly it was to be a question of speed and endurance between our ponies and the elk; so, quickly propping my heavy rifle against a bush, I took tight hold of little Smoke's head, and sent him best pace along the slope. For a mile or so it was very evident that, even in the snow, the elk's three legs were better than the four which were burdened with thirteen stone of flesh and accoutrements. I could barely keep the big beast in sight as I held the upper ground and she struggled along the bottom. Soon I saw that the creek-bed forked right and left, and I lost no little distance by speculating to the right, with a view to cutting my game off from the nearest section of the pine-hills. The elk swung round the corner to the left, and I followed suit at once by dipping in and out of the right-hand branch, and galloping parallel with the left. By this time Bronson's "squaw pony" was far behind, and little Smoke, with all his six-hundred-yard reputation (and six hundred yards is a long-distance race in Montana) was beginning to show very visible signs of the effect of some three miles through heavy snow. I had neither whip nor spurs, but soon found it necessary to untie my saddle-rope, and make use of its end to keep him galloping at all. The elk was no longer to be seen, and the ground becoming rather broken.

I bore down to the creek bottom with all the speed I could muster. There was the fresh and bloodstained trail plain enough—three heavy footmarks and a dragging limb. Poor brute! humanity as well as hunger called for her speedy death. The creek bed had been trodden tolerably level beneath the snow by wandering cattle; and rousing by means of a sharp blow or two what little fire remained in Smoke, I hurried along at a good hand-gallop still. Another mile, perhaps, and suddenly we reached not only again a junction-point of the creek's many tributaries; but, to make matters five times worse, that number of head of cattle had joined and confused the trail. It was just the toss of a coin this time "whether left should be right, and right should be wrong, or t'other way." To cease galloping might be to lose the elk; but it was im-

possible, without stopping, to determine which might be hers among the various cloven hoof-marks leading in either direction. So, speculating boldly, I struck to the right at the best speed still at Smoke's disposal, and, soon afterwards, was

rewarded by the sight of a broad patch of blood. Not only that, but a few hundred yards further, a turn round a high bank brought me all at once within full view of the object of my chase. With her yellow back up, her dark-maned neck hanging low, and her tongue lolling, the great elk was hobbling painfully along; and, though at sight of me she quickened her pace for a while, I felt she must now be mine. There was no covert of any moment within her reach, and in less than another half-mile I had brought her to bay in a small bunch of willows. She was done to a turn, and to tell the truth Smoke was almost in the same plight. Gladly he stood, with legs outstretched, and sides heaving under his woolly and dripping coat, while I clambered off, revolver in hand, holding my hard-earned prey safe at last. A bullet through the head secured her safer still; and another shot into the air helped to guide Bronson to the scene of action. Forty minutes without a check; a kill; and a Christmas dinner. Not a bad day's sport for the prairies!

But the work of the day was not nearly over yet. Here we were, fully seven miles from camp, ten more from home, and sternly determined neither to sleep out nor to lose any of our precious meat. Bronson was, fortunately, a most accomplished butcher, and had served a time at skinning buffalo, while buffalo were still in the land. We each possessed a good knife, and the barrel of his Winchester, if it wouldn't shoot, at least acted very well in lieu of a steel. So the comely hide was readily whipped off, feet and head and all encumbrance removed; but still the great body was heavier than our united efforts could avail to raise. Fortune again favoured us, in the fact that neither of our ponies was to be frightened at the smell of blood. By efforts almost superhuman we contrived to sever the strong backbone, and thus to divide the big deer in two. On one saddle we set the fore-quarters, with the skin covering them and drooping over the horse's loins, while the enormous ears and black mane surmounted the whole, and gave the figure a most weird appearance. On the other we perched the hind-

quarters and titbits, binding both bundles down with saddle-ropes and stirrup-leathers, after the fashion in which Indians and cow-boys fasten a load on a pack-horse, and which, simple as it may appear, is altogether an art, to be acquired only under proper tuition. By this time we had been pretty nearly caught hold of by the frost; the blood had congealed in red ice upon our hands; and the poor ponies were clothed in icicles. But the loads rode well. We made the best of our way, footing it beside the horses, and reached the cow-camp with the last glimmer of daylight. The ghost-like form and demon-like ears nodding on the foremost horse fairly scared the occupants of the loghouse, as they opened the door to our holloa, and let out the same steaming fog of hot air as before. But their alarm soon turned to joy and triumph; and their Christmas Dinner and ours on the morrow were veritable feasts to Diana.

GRASS COUNTRIES.

SEASON 1888—1889.



Oct. 20th, 1888.—The grass countries are only now wakening to the horn. The woodlands have already been roused, and dropped a few first leaves to its echo. Foxhunting in the open is quite a fortnight behind its time; and October of '88 will never make its mark as "the merriest month of all." A cheerless month it cannot be called; for the grain has been gathered and the stubbles are being turned in a blithe and prosperous fashion, in keeping with the turn of the tide, that at last is heralded for the farmer. Nor is the grazier without gladness. On his "bit of plough" depends his winter safety: and for the present his bullocks are fetlock-deep in rich herbage. But while the corn was about, foxhunters were perforce at home: and so far this bright October has belonged rather to an Indian summer than to an English autumn.

Summer is gone on swallow's wings,
No more the lark, the linnet sings.
There is a shadow on the plain
Of Winter ere he comes again,—
There is in woods a solemn sound
Of holloa warnings whispered round,
As Echo in her deep recess
For once had turned a prophetess.

—HOOD'S "Song of the Fox."

Ours is the brighter side. The dulness of winter exists for the poet, not for foxhunter, nor verily for fox—who, forsooth, would speedily be seen only as a keeper's scarecrow or as a dog-dealer's bait in a barrel, were it not for the strange infatuation that keeps millions of money circulating in Old England for his benefit.

Plentiful enough, moreover, he still appears to be, thanks to the appreciation of all who hunt and of all on whom hunting confers boon, direct or indirect. So far in the Midlands he has been found wherever sought—and now we only need rain, to make things pleasant for all parties. Scent has been keen, in the cold frosty mornings: and the young entry has caught up the business readily. Now we want to be riding to them: and the present week has been our first induction.

On Saturday (Oct. 13) we had even a little scamper over grass and fences; aye, and relished it, under protest. The most self-reliant broke their vows when others set the rash example; and while hounds were crossing the open they had fully two score of followers. But the experiment was no success; and is scarcely likely to be repeated even by the hardiest until some rain shall fall. 'This may be next week, next month, or at the Greek Calends (which hereabouts is held to be a date synonymous with the abolition of land burdens). But the moment rain comes, we shall be in the thick of fox-hunting. The interim may be employed in a dozen useful directions—*imprimis*, by our good friends the farmers in removing the wire-strands from athwart the path they so courteously throw open to us; by the hunting men of the country in working variously in the same great cause, to removal not only of wire but of grievances; by gilded youth in feathering itself afresh; by rusted age in repair of its war-paint; and, lastly but very seriously, by ladies equipping themselves in safety habits. It is not for me to puff this habit-maker or that. But safety against the awesome feat of hanging head downwards from the pommel can be easily bought, and ought to be insisted upon in the case of every woman who hunts.

You have heard how baked and banefully hard is Northamptonshire—its pasture ridges unyielding as the dry road, and the

turf, wherever close cropped, as resonant as a sounding board! And yet I may tell you of two good gallops with the Pytchley, and of two old foxes done to death in the open during the week past. The lesser run I saw—and this I will inflict upon you.

Wednesday, Oct. 24, was the date—a ring of thirty-five minutes about Thornby, to a capital scent and a sturdy old vixen. Wednesday, you remember, was a warm sunny day, succeeding a frosty morning. The ponds were ice-covered, and the grass glistened white under the northern shades, as we rode to Winwick Warren, for a 10.30 meet—a very tiny meet too, and a very local one. (But, gentlemen, you may look up your riding-garb, brighten your spurs, and study the forecast now. The moment it is written “S.W. winds, cloudy, some showers,” you may hurry down, to find the ditches well marked, the hedges thinning, and the plot gaily thickening.) The cubs and their parents, on Wednesday morning, were quickly ousted from the Thornby Spinneys. One was run to ground: and then we moved towards Elkington Bottom. A turnip field looked enticing, and hounds were led over it—while we trod the turnpike and spared the turnips. We even turned to the midday sandwich—but stopped in mid-mouthful to list to a strange uproar from the piece of green roots. “A hare, of course, and the puppies at riot”—and we munched contentedly onward. By-and-by we learned the cause of shout and whip-cracking. A lurcher dog had pounced on a fox just roused, bowled her over before the pack, and was only knocked off by a ready whipper-in. The noise vanished; and so, as we rode up, did the three red coats of the executive. The provender-box was hastily sheathed; and in hurry and wonder we set off in pursuit. Vows had been interchanged: comments had been muttered; and we ought to have stood still. Who was man enough to do so? A locked gate forced a tittup from fallow to stubble—and so the mischief began (the next chapter being to-morrow’s visit to the stable).

Turning leftward from Elkington Bottom, we rode a fast mile without an intervening fence. Then leftward still, we struck what in softer weather would have been an easy line to the West Haddon road, crossing it by jump in and scramble out, just short of Winwick Warren: so by grass, and such fences as we *must*, past what a gasping shepherd told us was Nortoft Lodge. The fences were of the kindest, easiest description; but the landing was (ugh!) shameful and cruel. But, again, hounds were running beautifully—what was to be done? Go home—no. Better a tear in the morning than discontent and regret to-night. Was not this, to most of us, the first taste of flesh, the first excitement of a new era, the first thrill of an old, peerless joy? No crowd now, no jostle; a fair scent and a well-known sphere. The very crack of an ash rail was music, as it shivered in quite friendly fashion to let our leader, and us after him, into a lane.

The best of the hunt, the best of the fun, was as we circled to Firefly, by aftermath and gateway and gap that made the way feasible and pleasant enough. Through the said spinney, which our fox had scarce cleared when hounds hove in sight to the loiterers of the morning. Up to Cold Ashby Village, round its back buildings, and forward over a good line pointing to Welford—the only terror a jump into a bean-stubble, and the relief at clearing the wide hidden ditch being quite wiped out by the horrid clatter of landing on the hard-baked clay. In a mile or so further the old vixen was forced to turn; and with hackles up the dog hounds swung to the right, while Naseby Reservoir shone in the sunlight beneath them. Racing back across the pastures and the poor allotments, they soon had their fox dodging them in the Welford and Thornby road—turned her in view towards Cold Ashby Village, and ran into her handsomely. A warm and cheery gallop—let the morrow do its worst. It sends a man home “feeling good,” as they phrase it over the water, where, however, they know nothing of the glow that belongs to, and lingers after, a true good gallop with foxhounds. This, and a good deal more, passes

into thought as, in the contentment of sport just witnessed and a cigar burning amiably, one saunters home through a country whose every field suggests a memory, every fence recalls an incident. The ride under such circumstances is by no means the worst part of foxhunting. A lame horse, a run lost, are frequent exponents of a very different state of feeling. But these are not for the present; and, indeed, should never be admitted into the scribe's elysium.

BREAKING THE ICE.

A CHARMING beginning was made by the Pytchley on Saturday, Nov. 3—and not its least charm lay in the slow, soaking rain that wrapped the proceedings, and us. A beginning it was, not so much of running and hunting, but of pleasant, practicable riding; and whoever knows the Shires must give the latter capacity at least a little place in the definition of what we, of the nineteenth century, understand as Sport. Houndwork is of itself a delightful thing—but what is foxhunting if students and lookers-on are excluded? Too many runs take place at all times with only a few witnesses. How is it when *everybody* is shut off, by hard ground and fences unrideable? Saturday was the first day whereon to start the new order of things, and to allow of men taking their due share in the fling and the fun of the chase.

There had been rain for a day and a night; the turf was in velvet, save where the crusted horn of an old cold pasture still held out against the softening drizzle; and a quiet, melting rainfall made the parched ground better hour by hour.

The "little pack" had been taken to Newnham, a new and judicious fixture, with intent upon Fawsley and Badby Wood. In a small round spinney on the domain, and close to the house, a fox was chopped. A second went off during the brushing (the eating being dispensed with, fur apparently patchy). So, hounds were laid on with their fox quite free to

choose his way—which he did by dodging in the Daventry and Byfield road, and enabling us all to ride over his line on the turnpike. But, this being set right, a smart twenty-five minutes ensued. They ran a circle and they mopped him up—grass throughout and mostly gates. (The first five minutes, by the way, showed us fairly how we ought to have ridden the finish of the great Braunston run of last season. We ought to have stuck to hounds that day, nor deserted them for a bridle path. And they beat us. Isn't it always so? Why, the line was an easy one—even for beaten horses.) To-day we went a wide sweep towards Charwelton, gated it happily through the fierce doubles of Fawsley, met an in-and-out at the turnpike road, circled past Charwelton's gorsy hillside, and completed a tour of the Fawsley home lordship with a who-whoop in a double hedgerow. Scent was holding; pace was fast; and it was just the gallop for the breaking of the ice.

Now we were up in our stirrups; had jumped a fence on fair soft turf; and had galloped our blood aglee.

Staverton Wood for the afternoon. Here they grow larch and bracken—good covert for fox in November, and where fox can do as he likes while the bracken lives. So a turn up the hillside wood, and a turn back again. Then a scramble o'er the apple summit of the queer eminence that overlooks all Warwickshire and half Northamptonshire—and away to the piping of the little ladies. (I don't mean the crackling cadence of the dames of the cottage on the hilltop—who, rightly enough, bade us "go arter the fox, sir, he's dipped to the garden.") We slipped and slithered downwards, trod the new-dug garden shamefully—and looked, askance. For it was yet a drop, a sturdy stake-and-bound, and on to very hard turf in the dim depth. But come ye from High Leicestershire—to be stayed by such paltry dread? A dip, and a drop, and a groan besides; he lands with a quiver, and on he rides. "Not for sale, sir;" but kept for his good qualities—as in the days that are gone, when the best performers out of all Melton would seldom have passed the vet. Turn to your left, for a dart over the clean-cut

hedge, and a pause at a gate—while the huntsman comes up from the wood and the game is fairly set going. Now we are for Badby Wood; but a “muck cart,” as Northamptonshire would delicately phrase it, turned our fox to the good, and set him for Hellidon and the joint corners of several Hunts.

This was a Bicester fox most assuredly. He knew of Griffin's Gorse, and he went there—nearly as straight as we could have ruled the way for him. Now (I may whisper in your very inmost ear) we all, and each and every one, verge closely upon cowardice at this first beginning of a winter's career. And thus a none-too-difficult line called for as much indecision as a far stronger course of December's offering. The *little places* were difficult to find. Gaps have grown up; and timber looks terribly strong in November. Fence for fence, we rode this way last February, also from Staverton Wood. Ah, but then we had not with us the same lusty trippers from Harboro' to-day, else had the ash rails shivered much more blithely and readily. In the end, however, and quickly—we made a way—yes, and found a trifle of wire ('tis all to come down, though, I gratefully hear)—passing Hellidon merrily, and leaving the village several fields to the right. Then over the hill to Griffin's Gorse, which the Bicester do hunt. The line was forward—had scarcely touched the covert—and five minutes later was at an end just short of Byfield. That fox knew more, I trow, of the buildings of the Ironcross Farm than his foes could fathom. At thirty-five minutes by the watch he beat them.

I have probably not conveyed fittingly the pleasures of Saturday's afternoon gallop. The country formed by no means its least merit: for it was smooth if not actually flat, and rideable enough without being insignificant. Our fox was bold and the pace was good—as is testified by the point and time, five miles in thirty-five minutes. Among those who took part in it were the Master, Mr. and Mrs. W. Blacklock, Mr. and Mrs. Byass, Lord Henry Paulet, Captains Jacobson and Soames, Messrs. Wroughton, Onslow, Craven (*père et fils*), Atherton,

E. Johnstone, &c. And as they had run well into the Bicester country, hounds and several of the little field had a long journey to make to their several homes.

AN EARLY WEEK.

THE volume of my story must depend for excuse upon the wealth of its subject. Sport has been flowing freely upon us, as I hope I may be able to convey.

Let me pencil the Pytchley burst of Friday, Nov. 23, while it is yet fresh in mind, and before overclouded by after event. For sport is coming quickly, and happy occasion is multiplying.

Brock Hall is one of the oldest and prettiest lawn meets of the Hunt. A quarter-hour margin was mostly occupied with the tale of yester-afternoon—the Warwickshire second gallop. Then to business. The Brock Hall fox ran short, and ran scentless. Ah, how little do we know of the law or accident of scent!

Wilton Osier-bed is a little brookside covert under Mr. Craven's close care, and almost beneath his very homestead. It gives us at least a gallop a year, and more often on the first occasion of asking. A brace of foxes were here. One went in view, the other was away by the brookside; and a fitting field threaded the bridlegate almost as quickly as the pack settled to the last-named. The flat meadow spread them to a broad front as the brook turned across them. Mr. Craven, as in honour bound, showed promptly that the water need be no terror; and he, Mr. Adamthwaite, Mr. Muntz, Captain Middleton, and Mr. Wroughton swept the deep ditch almost in a line. It was nothing awful, perhaps ten feet deep and ten feet broad. But it brought blunder and mishap profusely: and the above, and only perhaps a dozen more, were to hounds for the next mile. Yes, there was a scent now; and merrily hounds took it across the low meadows.

On this occasion, for honesty's sake and that I may attempt

no more than I can, let me break through my ordinary rule and describe my own venture—so to illustrate merely the view of the chase that fell to me and my coterie. An old head upon young shoulders (the old head mine, the shoulders my green beginner's), we recovered ourselves at the water, and picked ourselves piecemeal out of the next thorn ditch—a handsome lesson that did Shoulders good service for all the rest of the pilgrimage. Ah, we must have example—and where shall it be found better than at the coat-tails of one who has led us in many a gay dance before? So in safety and glee, from meadow to meadow, till the railway embankment of Long Buckby suddenly jumps up in view. The pack tear up to the very station, and almost touch the road that leads under its bridge—then swing suddenly back along the embankment side. Conceit gets the better of us. We discard our pilot, dive under the bridge in the good company of the Master, Lord Spencer, and Mr. Adamthwaite—and bind ourselves to the probability of our fox having yet made his point across the railway. Aye, we almost chuckle in the thought of what a nick we shall get when they turn to us. So out of the road over a small drop fence, and hard as we can gallop close parallel to the railway—the red coats bobbing visibly beyond the double-hedged roadway.

Race as we may, we can gain nothing, and nothing comes to us. Too self-willed to turn across at the next bridge, and take up a well-earned after place, we push forward still for another mile—only finally to recross the railway, with a clear loss of three fields. Now they are running their hardest towards Brington Village, and hard as ever they bend up wind and point for Brington Clump—the bend serving us a little, but the gleaming pack urging on a full field and a half ahead, with Capt. Middleton's grey conspicuous and close on their left rear, Mr. Wroughton and his bay in equally good position on their right, while a dozen men in pink and black are in a cluster at the heels of these. Meanwhile a lady is down at some blind ditched timber; and next minute a horse is seen to fall prone as he nears another little brook, then to rise and rear, and now

to be struggling in his last gasp. Poor old "Gridiron"—you have died in the sphere that ennobled you! Over more and bigger fences have you led us, in the years that have lapsed since your win of the Conyngham Cup, than can be set to the credit of any ten horses in the Shires. May your new hunting grounds be happy; and may your master soon fill your stall worthily! It will be no unmanly moisture that damps his pillow to-night, old Gridiron.

The grass fields are growing larger, the strong fences are wider apart, the pace is no less, as the chase streams onward to Brington Clump. Leaving this wooded landmark just on the left hand, hounds dash downwards beneath Brock Hall—the field largely discounted and scattered, and all but the better few now obviously slackening, or rather urging and pressing in vain. A dozen gates make the finish easier; but it is "all out" with most horses when hounds stop at a drain one field below the Hall. *Only twenty-three minutes*, an excellent authority gave it. As for my watch, it had forgotten its duty—thrown it over in the excitement, or maybe in the ditch. But the gallop was unmistakably fast, the country undoubtedly good; and, if a half ring, it was wholly a charming burst. And the ground never rode better than now—moist enough, but not deep, underneath, and all the more solid and sound for the rough winds that for days past have been testing our temper and hatstrings. Make the most of it, gentlemen. Leave your sorrows for Christmas or summer. You may reckon in some slight measure on the morrow, but nothing on the day after—how much less on the *year* after. You know not even if December shall be wrapped in frost: you have no right to even a *guess* upon life. Why, the very existence of foxhunting in the future is a subject beyond your ken and mine. And now to dream of the happiest of all topics—and to wake for Hellidon.

Suggestions for the better conduct of the chase, in matters both major and minor, appear to be the duty of every man. Here is a point that surely calls for attention and amendment.

It is a regrettable fact that no fixed plan is in vogue among the countrymen of the Grass Countries for dealing with the many loose horses that bring shillings to their honest nets. Witness two instances belonging to the past week, illustrative of two entirely different methods of procedure. In the one case the rescuer took the runaway by the bridle and ran on with him till he could go no further—seeking the owner at the tail of the hounds! In the other, catching a horse in the road, as the hunt swept by, he forthwith climbed upon a gate with the



RAN TILL HE COULD
GO NO FURTHER

CLIMBED A GATE
LIT HIS PIPE & AWAITED
THE TURN OF EVENTS

reins in his hand, lit his pipe, and there awaited the turn of events, or the arrival of the dismounted one. But the latter, poor man—having by ill luck been persuaded by the closeness of that day to inclose himself in cords instead of leathers—soon tired of crossing a particularly strong thorn country on foot, and leaving the lost hunter to chance, walked home to lunch—his second horseman eventually appearing with both in hand.

PACE AND BLOOD.

A SCENT again on Monday, Nov. 26, and what I may safely term "an excellent hound run" with the Grafton that morning. The wind had dropped, the sun showed us his face once more, and we were treated to sport that we could all see and enjoy. The meet was at Woodford, the run from Hinton Gorse adjacent.

It was nearly half an hour before a fox would go : which, as each and every corner was closely besieged by foot people, was scarcely to be wondered at. But when once away, they ran him for fifty minutes—with only a single trifling check—and pulled him down in the open. Over a nice and none too difficult country, too—not straight enough to warrant the spinning of a lengthy yarn ; but withal a very merry hunt.

Fox and hounds left in about the only direction open to them, viz., by Hinton House ; and we, one and all, lost useful time by crowding into the little gateways when we ought to have been jumping the little hedges alongside. But somehow we adopt very gatey habits whenever we find ourselves at all in the vicinity of the awe-inspiring domain of Fawsley, with its double ramparts and its many doorways. So hounds easily kept their 'vantage up to the Byfield and Daventry turnpike—where, as is customary, their fox was headed. He threaded the road for a while towards Badby, then rose the hill leftward ; and a sweet piece of hunting laid open the puzzle inch by inch. Now they ran hard, and I must tax memory to decipher the line. It led over two lofty hills of grass and red plough (if their names are not Blackdown and Vengeance, I read my map wrongly)—kept clear of Griffin's Gorse, by two fields to the right. Now we recognised the ground of the first Pytchley Saturday of this season ; and quickly and fearfully we asked of the wire strand we remembered then. It's down, answered the good farmer, while he held gate for our passage—and his word was quickly proved by fifty men jumping the fence beyond.

The road from Byfield to Hellidon was in itself bad falling ground to a tangled hedge and ditch—and a frightened horse emphasised it by striking his prostrate rider with his heel. (Nor was this the worst fall of the day into a road: for Mr. G. Campbell came off almost scatheless as compared with Baron M. de Tuyll later in the day. But the painful accidents which too often form the black side of fox-hunting must never be my theme—though a word of sympathy and regret cannot but slip occasionally from the flippant pen). Within a mile of Prior's Marston occurred the one brief check—which was more than righted by the huntsman galloping his pack forward three fields to a cap uplifted. This set us on the spot where the Warwickshire stopped in their morning scurry from Shuckburgh last week. But there was a stouter scent in the valley to-day; and hotly they ran it round the village of Hellidon and to the edge of Dane Hole. Too blown and heated to enter the covert, he struck forward yet over the grass beneath Catesby House; climbed the upland between that and Staverton; and strove hard for Badby Wood. "Yonder he goes"—the gladdest of all sights and the most exciting of all signals that pertain to the killing of bold reynard. "Yonder he goes" through the sheep, yonder he crawls over the greensward on the brow. The bristling ladies are savaging on his track, are at his very heels—are in view—are on him. *Who-whoop*. And the big wood was only two fields further.

Free from cares political and questions polemical, by no one were the delights of riding to hounds more plainly evidenced than in the person of Lord Spencer—mounted on a four-year-old bred at Althorp. Lord Alfred Fitzroy, no doubt representing the noble master, was also in close presence and observance throughout the hunt, which, if I mistake not, was a study of pleasure to two gallant new-comers (I have put the sentence too clumsily to admit of the additional freedom of appending their names). But I shall add that the yeomen of the immediate neighbourhood were very aptly and forwardly represented by Mr. Waring on his well-trying grey.

And another of the same sort as Friday's was the Pytchley gallop of Wednesday, Nov. 28. Two sharper bursts will not belong to the season—let it even proceed with the happy energy with which it has begun. Yelvertoft Hill-side gave us Wednesday's stirring episode; and the scene was carried over the rough gorges of Elkington, the steep highlands of Cold Ashby, and finally the strong vale of Naseby—as fast and severe a twenty minutes as ever was ridden, and afterwards they killed their fox.

I need not go back to the morning, beyond saying that we had been disappointed at Crick for want of a fox, and at Lilbourne for want of scent. But by middle day, the first rime-frost of the winter had melted away, the earth was warm, the air was still, and we were very hopeful. But the tension and excitement that belong to a first five minutes had to be undergone for nothing—when we started from beneath the covert beyond the canal bank. Our fox was headed home by drain-diggers; and sullen and sad we slunk back to the upper covert. There was nothing here, though, to hold him long: already the little ladies were warming the oven: and a new anxiety arose, lest a chop should be served for our midday dish. Now he leapt through their very midst, squirmed and wriggled as he passed their snapping jaws, and for dear life raced for the handgate by the canal bridge. Crossing the bridge he had not ten yards in his favour, and for a mile along the canal side there were six couple straining for a mouthful of his blood-red fur. Twenty men scattered over the bridge among the tail-hounds. Two hundred others thundered down the cart track in their wake. Goodall, and we within, extricated ourselves as best we might from the entanglement of rabbit-netting and rail-guarded handgate; and now I have the picture before me—a rough and narrow green field sprinkled with scurrying horsemen—a struggling chain of hounds hurrying to their leaders—a gate ahead, and for an obvious and only course another gate and another bridge, which the chase must cross to reach Elkington or the

Hemplov. "The devil take the hindmost" indeed ! Why, he *had them all* but a foremost score—and the fastest of these never got a pull till a four-mile effort placed them at Naseby Woolleys !

By the back of the farmhouse below the gully of Elkington Bottom went a thin stream of horsemen—headed, I fancy, by Mr. C. Marriott and seconded by Mr. Wroughton and the first whip, while parallel to them on the other side of the house a second thin stream worked up the steep ascent. The former crossed and recrossed a straggling hedge ; the two parties met on the summit ; and the whole, led by the Master, wheeled rightward to plunge into the steep gulch of Elkington Bottom. No chance of tightening hold upon rein, except in tune with a lustier squeeze from the knee. Gallop up the green houseside we *must*. Blood and condition shall help us or fail us. Now we are mounting Honey Hill—at an angle more suited to wild Dunkery of Exmoor than to rich Northamptonshire. Thus climbing, and straining, and striving, for the first several minutes—then to choose between holding the lofty station attained or turning downwards to the pack now sinking the valley beneath. Mr. Adamthwaite alone chooses the better part, darts through the overhanging bullfinch, and joins hounds on lower ground. Even then he can barely keep his hold—so sharp and unflagging is the pace, as they rise a last little brow and give him quick practice of the old subject, "in-and-out-a-road." Nor is it the only sampler of similar subject—for-in-and-out-a-plantation comes next, and in-and-out-a-rickyard immediately afterwards.

Now the "upper succle," as dear Jorrocks dubbed them, swoop down from their high estate, and take head in the fray—Mr. Mills bringing up his juniors and leading them all, along the valley land, past the left of the Reservoir and up to the plantations amidst which nestles the house of Naseby Woolleys. The Master, his huntsman and whip, Messrs. F. Langham, G. Cunard, Pender, Wroughton, Marriott, Mills (*tertius*), Forte, Sheriffe, and several others, were all with hounds at this time ;

but, if I may be permitted to say so, no one was better placed than Mrs. Cross, who rode this trying gallop wonderfully. Well, their fox at all events was blown—and some forty minutes afterwards (most of which had been spent in or about the coverts) hounds were on him in a ditch near by. I trust I may not have made much of little—but this was truly a fierce bright scurry, making a fitting final page to my diary of a week of high sport.

A RUN LOST.

EVENTS cannot all be of one pattern when we are hunting the fox—fortunately, perhaps for readers of story, fortunately or unfortunately as the case may be, for us the actors and participants. We have our merry days and our black days. I have my pen in hand on an evening that is dark and melancholy. Even dinner has had no power to efface memory or to brighten it. To state the point plainly—we (and in saying we, I mean all who went forth in scarlet and pride, and a community, too, with whom I am proud to include myself) we *lost a run*—not a *great* run, but all the sport that the day contained—and there is gnashing of teeth from Harborough to Daventry to-night. For myself, I can only employ an expression from over the water—I have been “kicking myself” since two o’clock—and I shall continue to kick myself till the Grafton cheer my stricken soul on Monday morn. Rend my garments I cannot afford to do—let the process be ever so consoling—since they are already in a state of decadence in keeping with a decade’s wear, and most of them carry a different button. (In charity and sympathy you may forgive a man almost anything—even a pun, who has been chewing the bitter cud of disappointment for some hours, and is scarcely likely to get rid of the taste for some days.)

I’ll tell you how it happened—and now you may compose yourselves for a story—“in three words,” I promise you. Badby Wood is a great covert belonging to the Pytchley. And there

they met and hunted on Saturday, Dec. 1st. Good men and many better by half than good men, came from far and near—very smart, very keen, and more or less experienced. Twice at least did they make a start from Badby Wood, rode round and about its immediate neighbourhood—spoke out their opinion forcibly on the subject of a very ringing fox, laid down the law explicitly as to when one hunt had begun and another taken up the thread—and in fact had spent the bulk of the day very busily, very unsatisfactorily, and very confusedly. About 1.30 a fox was either “fresh-found” or newly-found, close to the place of meeting; and there was a new start. We dashed over the Newnham Brook by the straitest and narrowest ways we could find, thought ourselves in for a gallop, and returned once again by way of the village of Badby into this mortal wood. Threading our way through farmyard and by-lanes, we could accept no other conclusion than that our village fox meant to hand over his feeble brush at once: so sauntered into the oak jungle to resign ourselves placidly to fate, and possibly to luncheon. The latter may or may not have been an accompanying coincidence. Hounds were within earshot, and we felt safe. They were running a beaten cub. What could happen?

What did happen was this—as I gather since from a trusty eye-witness. An old red fox, sauntering up the woodside near the well-known beech trees, altogether put a spoke in the wheel of the existing chase. Hounds touched his line, and finding it warm, fresh, and strong, sprang into it with a vigour that the day had not yet seen. Goodall himself nearly missed their departure, as they dashed over the hill into Fawsley Park. Then he kept his horn going for a mile. But the brow of upland was between him and his listeners, and never a sound could reach them. Indeed, it was in many cases half an hour before they had a suspicion of the fact that the pack was elsewhere than in Badby Wood. Messrs. J. F. Goodman and A. Fabling once again reaped reward of their accustomed perseverance and attention, and with Mr. and Mrs. W. Blacklock and Mr. Waring, alone joined huntsman and first whip across the wide open

valley to Mantel's Heath. Passing the right of this, they galloped with hounds up to Little Preston; and crossing the road between that hamlet and Preston Capes, embarked on a pretty and rideable line to the village of Maidford. Thus was a quick, straight gallop carried some four or five miles into the Grafton country. It is thought their fox went on into Plump-ton Wood, as a couple and a half of hounds found their way nearly thither. But they lost him soon after passing Maidford. And one of the best fields of the new season was left at Badby.

Had I, or you, disconsolate friends, been second whip, of course we should not have been left behind—or equally of course should have been well trounced for neglect of duty. But in our case pleasure too often takes the place of duty, and so we lose grip of both. And, besides our predilection and laziness, we are bound to remember (in some hunts *made* to remember) that the persistency necessary to the occupation of a whip is on our part altogether unwelcome and superfluous. We cannot all hunt the huntsman (though many of us do run the poor man very hard, particularly when he gives us a chance by working across his own foil), and still less are we expected, or welcomed, as a satellite to the minor constellation (be he of first or second magnitude). No, we must “take our chance with the rest,” accept our mischances with a pleasant grin, and vow attention and pertinacity in the future. What to do in the event of failure is another question—which you must answer for me. To post yourself on an eminence—looking into space as provided by a great green valley and a blue distance with a mocking sun dancing in your eyes, is no pastime. But it is almost as productive as galloping into nothingness—riding hard for a Will o' the Wisp—not half so plausible an undertaking as tilting at a windmill. You may hang back to preserve material for a possible event of the afternoon, or at any rate of another day. You may stand on the hillside sighing—your flask and case gone with your second horse—store up a chill of liver and lung—and finally join hounds just as they are going home.

On the whole, I think there is more dignity—and possibly more honesty—certainly more chance of deception—in towelling on while information keeps you on the line, and in putting in an appearance after the fox is broken up—and with your horse very nearly as tired as other people's. Yes; this is the right policy—unless you have strength to adopt a better, viz., straightway to go home. In future I shall go home and write for *The Field*.

A BROKEN LEG.

P.S.—*Dec. 3.* There are worse things after all than losing a run. To lose two months' hunting just as the season is in full swing, is certainly a sorer trial—mitigated though it be, I may gratefully add, by kindly condolence and manifold sympathy. My diary is closed for the present—though if great sport happens, good fellows will tell me of it, and I will pass it briefly on.

A BROKEN RECORD.

THERE has been ample sport during the past fortnight—as should be in the month of December, with the weather open and a four-seasons' accumulation of foxes to play upon. The Pytchley have kept the ball rolling busily. Their best achievement would seem to have dated from Brock Hall on Friday, 21st, when, starting from one of the spinneys behind the house, they drove their fox merrily to his death in about thirty minutes.

They came to draw Braunston Gorse in a fierce storm of wind and rain. And now, for a brief while, I come in as eye-witness. *Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum*—which in this instance you may translate as “It is not given to every poor broken-legged devil to look out upon Braunston Gorse.” But it has been given to me. And greedily I hoped that the grand old play of Braunston to Shuckburgh, in one act

of seventeen minutes, might be performed while I was there to see. But in vain I craned my neck from pillow to window—like a young swallow hungering from its nest beneath the eaves—and tightly grasped my wishing ring, in the shape of Tom Firr's old crooked horn that has twanged from Bunker's Hill, been dug from beneath him at the Curate, and has even been taken to scare the jackals on the Nilgiris. The treat was not to be—though it nearly came off. At least three foxes were in the gorse, one of them set off for Flecknoe and the side-hill that slopes from Shuckburgh, and they were within an ace of showing me a point-to-point that would have warmed my blood better than the Run of the Season in a plough country. The village stands, a kind of Cæsar's Camp—a nest on a green peak—on the Warwickshire side of Braunston Brook. How the land came to be so parcelled, I do not pretend to say—but as a fact the farms of Flecknoe parish are portioned out as divisions of a circle whose centre is the village, and whose sector lines, each from each, are great boundary-fences in the strongest and most practical sense of the term. Thus, though you may ride up to Flecknoe from the brook on a very moderate hunter—you want nearly the best in the Hunt to carve your way across the concentric farms.

I look up from my paper at this moment on to the great double that last spring scattered us all in the well-remembered gallop from Braunston Gorse—all except (as I did not grasp until a week after) Major Cosmo Little, who flew it in one, and Mr. Pender who followed in two. Ah, I wish the whole scene had been repeated this afternoon! I warrant me I had been carried over that country more blithely by my old binoculars than ever I crossed it on quadruped. But Fates were very contrary. While the squadrons on Braunston Hill were being buffeted in the gale—now driven off in solid order by the scourging rainstorms, now edging back to the gorse as a brief lull in the hurricane allowed them to face about, and detaching every now and then a deserter to gallop away through the mist like a flying aide-de-camp through the smoke

of battle—a long delay took place within the fortress of thorn and privet. The enemy lay close and declined the challenge. At length there was a break-away in the most desired of all directions—the horsemen on the hilltop closed up for a charge—and it seemed Flecknoe-and-Shuckburgh for a hundred. But hounds were otherwise occupied: and *their* object led them forth another way, viz., towards Braunston Village.

And here I surrender the thread again to other hands. Stay, but I have a parenthesis, before I close the window and return to the solitude of crippledom. You have seen how it is sometimes advertised “A gentleman having himself been cured of this, that, or the other malady, is anxious to extend the benefit to other sufferers, and will accordingly forward prescription on receipt of stamped envelope.” Now, my charity on this occasion is genuine; and I don’t want your stamped envelopes. Here is my recipe—not to cure, but at least to palliate—*insomnia*, the worst attendant, the sorest phase of broken bonedom. It is not the knitting of the fracture, it is not the misery of imprisonment, it is not even the diabolical action of splint and bandage, that wear the soul and strain the nerves of the prisoner. But it is the ticking of the clock through the long still hours, when thought is exhausted and merely hovers over trifles, or settles itself upon some atom of no concern. The weary eyelids and tired mind can no more apply themselves to such reading as properly legitimises the midnight oil, than the enfeebled patient may take refuge in such sedative as a bottle of port. But to fidget the night through—and night after night—is distressing as it is injurious. How, then, brother fox-hunters—for surely you may, any and all of you, be on the accident-list in turn? And I write knowing well, aye and with multiple proof on every hand, that we belong nowadays to no such class as mere

. . . folk that love idlenesse
And not delite have of in businesse
But for to hunt and hauke and play in medes
And many other such idle dedes.

So my recipe shall be no slur upon your understanding, no insult upon your resource—while, I answer for it, it shall be found to meet the occasion. When the night is at its longest, when dulness is unbearable, and the demon Fidget is pulling at every nerve-string—ring up a light, prop yourself for action, and *have Jorrocks brought to your bed*. Open the well-thumbed pages at random, follow him through a lecture, flounder with him in the forest, struggle with him over the dreaded open, accompany him to dinner and ball, mark his education of Benjamin, and join him in his daily occupations—as sketched by Surtees and pictured by Leech—and, believe me, the clock will gallop round, black night shall have its solemnity scattered, and the grey dawn shall break upon a new man—content to laugh on, or soothed to a gentle nap such as came from Beckford upon Benjamin.

January 3, 1889.—As far as I can learn, the year went out leaving every stable more or less crippled by the constant strain to which it has been subjected, and by the trying ordeal of deep ground. For some seasons past a cry has gone up against the forced extravagance of keeping up a full stud when two or three horses would have sufficed for all requirements. At the present time a murmur, different but equally pronounced, is to be heard, also on the score of extravagance. Every man is short of horses. If the season resumes its swing at once, they must have some more—or find pressing excuse for “business elsewhere.” Wet seasons more often bring sport, but they certainly bring lame horses. To jump off a spring board is comparatively a safe and easy process. To rise out of a slough is to court sprains and blows, or punctured wounds; for horses can neither clear their fences nor jump in collected form.

With a hard frost outside, and consequently little or no news penetrating to the accident ward, my subject is naturally at a standstill—even if the immediate look-out left me heart enough

to write. Intellect and exercise are as inseparable still as when the most practical of poets held out for *mens sana in corpore sano*. Macaulay, we are led to believe, got through more solid reading (and *retained* it all, too) during his voyage round the Cape than most men digest in a lifetime. But Macaulay was not seasick. Edmund Yates kept his pen busy throughout his little holiday in prison. But they made his "cell" very comfortable, and I don't fancy the journalist was ever a keen athlete. (Still less were the charms of outdoor life the main subject of his writing.) But to the inferior mind—and more especially to the mind already acknowledging itself in bondage to the sports of the field—it is a matter of impossibility to work, or even think, seriously when the body is pent and inactive from week's end to week's end. To frivel is the sole occupation of ninety-nine men out of a hundred on boardship or in crippledom. The busy man has always spare time, on a pinch. The idler's day is gone ere even begun.

There is little comes to me from outside, through the white frost and the shadowy fog, save these murmurs of lamed horses, and here and there a groan over an old favourite whose doom is sealed and whose destiny is the Kennels. Worse than this there have been several death records in the two months of hunting already past. Be the owner rich or poor, he can ill spare, and seldom replace, the picked one of his stable, in the middle of a season: and, more than that, he is not made of the stuff of which fox-hunters are usually fashioned if he can look upon the loss of his old comrade as only so much money out of pocket, so much temporary inconvenience sustained.

There is a little work, my fellow fox-hunters of the Midlands, that is at least as open to you now as in the busier times when duty calls you daily to the covert-side. And most of you, I take it, are still on the spot, waiting for this "cold snap" to pass over. You cannot but remember exactly where several of those little bits of wire remain that served to frighten you during the past weeks? Go and see about them. Ask that they may be pulled down by the owner or by you (*i.e.*, the

village smith under your orders and owner's permission). You will meet, I warrant you, with unvarying courtesy and seldom a refusal. And you may be saving your best friend's neck in one parish, while he is doing the same by you in another.

On Saturday the Pytchley battled the snowstorm, brought off their meet at Daventry, and pursued the foxes of the immediate neighbourhood under all the drawbacks of cold, damp, discomfort, and semi-darkness. An excellent day's sport it was—for the shoemaker of Daventry or for the cripple in a carriage. And you, therefore, hale and well-mounted reader, may turn the page over, an you please. Not a single boot, I trow, was built in Daventry that day. The sons of leather left their last, tied their dusky aprons round their waists, hitched a bootlace to the collars of their cur dogs, and set forth in force to see the fun at Braunston Gorse. Whether their over-keenness here cost them their sport I am not in a position to aver. But certain it is, hounds could find no fox; and the shoemakers had to foot it further afield. They had ample sport yet, though—as far as they were able to witness it through the blinding snowflakes. For even if they failed to reach the crown of Staverton Hill before fox and hounds left at score—they either came up to the hunt awaiting them, where the game was to ground, in a road drain by Badby House, or five minutes later they came face to face with the whole outfit careering back over the fields towards Braunston Gorse.

Nor am I, unfortunately, in a position to declare whose was the valiant terrier that shot reynard out from under the road. I hope, though, it was no aristocrat's dog, but rather one of the true Mont St. Crispin breed, of which there were a score of specimens at hand—of sizes to fit every calibre of drain or tunnel-pipe. Yes, and from the standpoint of wheels, too, this was a goodly run. The fox unearthed led off for a mile or two, within easy view from the road, and then in some fashion or other reserved himself for another day—while the snow-flecked cavalcade moved off to seek a fresh start. Of all comfortless days this was surely the very worst. Had men

enjoyed the protection of an oat-sack apiece round their shoulders (like many of their attendants on foot) they would at all events have carried a look of preparedness. The honest sacking was altogether more suggestive of warmth than the scarlet "extra superfine" which clung coldly to shivering shoulders. However, if there was no great sport, there was, happily, constant movement taking place—and the day was thus made just endurable.

About this point I may come upon the scene in the light of a tenant farmer, who, by reason of the custom of the country—and influenced, possibly, by the fact that my landlord is a fox-hunter—am fain to put up with the passage of a crowd of horsemen across my holding. Is there not a popular little handbook "*My Farm of 20 Acres and how I made it Pay?*" I have not yet perused it, nor do I believe it will enable me to solve the question so far as my tenancy is concerned; at any rate the system of farming will have to be on very new lines, and the cow and the foal must speedily give place to some more paying class of stock. No, I must move with the times. First of all, my landlord shall mend all my fences for me, lest I string him or his friends up upon barbed wire, like so many eels on a nightline. Secondly, he shall find me a complete new set of gates that open to a hunting crop, and swing to the latch of their own accord. Thirdly, as I am about to buy some hens, I shall require at once a substantial advance from the Hunt poultry fund. Fourthly, and this on the word of a freeborn Briton, no man shall ever again ride through my garden, hounds not running hard, unless he stop to drink, whether I be there or not. Under these conditions, and subject to such other claims as I may from time to time have occasion to bring forward, as, for instance, due regard to my arrangements for shooting over the estate, will I lay 20 acres of sound turf at the feet of the Pytchley Hunt.

WAFTED FROM AFAR.

SUCH a lovely winter has not visited us for years—was there ever such a January? I ask you. But let me be excused from extolling its charms. Mine is the soberer task of transcribing what is told me as happening on these delicious days, when the sunlight brings gladness even through a window pane. Ah me!—were I but a duchess in a brougham, I too might be happy. To my lower-class understanding, mirth is begotten of activity, life is of fresh air and free movement. Sense and sight are of no avail to one who must sit still. But to history.

No. *I* was not with the wrong pack on Friday last, Jan. 18. Daventry, Weedon (Road Weedon, is it not?) and the north probably went to Brington and the Pytchley. How much better off am I, to whom the postman brings my sport—sometimes in outline joyful and prolonged, sometimes in commentary jerky and protesting. In either case the meaning is clear. There has been a run, or there has been a day of disappointment. I haven't endured the latter. I can throw heart and soul into the former. For my own benefit—not for yours, who trust me for facts—I can incident the outline, fill in the by-play, take my fun to the full—second-hand fun, maybe—but fun for all that, and as for the failures, I throw them aside. I have had no bootless days; I haven't even a lame horse. I wish you had been at Wappenham on Friday—you will go there next time—and the Pytchley shall that day have the run of the season, from Nobottle Wood (?).

Yet Wappenham is no far cry from the border line: and, besides, does it not adjoin the very pick of the Grafton country, Weedon Bushes (adjacent to Weedon Lois), Plumpton Wood, and all their green surroundings? There are two sides to Wappenham—as there are two sides to every venture in life. Here is what came of the chance on Friday; and I would have given—at this moment *nothing* that I have to give would seem exorbitant—could I have ridden that day with the Grafton pack (were they the ladies, Frank Beers? I have a notion

they *must* have been. My ears are surely tingling now with their dainty notes.) Ten miles, from Whistley Wood to Everdon Village, over the sweetest line the Grafton can map—and for the last ten miles as straight as a bowstring, as far as I make it on memory's chart, having no atlas before me.

One o'clock saw them at Allithorne Wood. Ten minutes later they were away—for as fine a run as you will find in the chronicles of Wakefield Lawn. Hounds never touched a covert—though they passed many—in the next two hours and more; and at the end they pulled down as stout a fox as ever did credit to woodland birth.

The line—slow and crooked to Wappenham, fast and straight by Plumpton, Weedon Bushes, and Canons Ashby to Little Preston. A beaten fox struggled along the valley to Snorscombe, and was run into in the open under Everdon Village—time two hours and ten minutes. Even the best of the horses were more than satisfied, for the ground rode deep indeed, in spite of a week of weather mild and dry; and to see the run it was necessary to jump a number of fences quite unusual. A field of some seventy or eighty people saw the find at Allithorne. About half of them rode through to the finish. In fact, a goodly proportion saw most of the run—among them notably being Lord Penrhyn, Lords Alfred Fitzroy, Southampton, Algernon Fitzroy, Capts. Jacobson and Greville, Messrs. Fuller, Gosling, Knightley, &c., &c. And you remember what an afternoon it was—a day on which you might see and hear and enjoy to the utmost the delightful science of riding to hounds. Bear in mind, too, that these hounds were the Grafton, that the country was such as you might choose for schooling or elect for chasing, that the scent was a working if not actually a brilliant one, that their fox was a type of bold energy—and, tell me, what would you, or I, not give to have been there!

WHEELS ON THE HILLTOP.

THE weather—I must always begin with reference and report on it, for is it not ever a prime factor, if not actually of the sport, at least of its enjoyment? This sunny January of '89 has been "away ahead" of all Januaries of the past quarter-century. It has made fox-hunting a picnic—and a rich picnic in the matter of sport. For why? the ground has been wet, *underneath*, and old foxes are still plentiful. Gently, huntsmen—you are revelling in blood, old blood too, that is not to be tasted except by skill and proud success, but old blood for all that. We shall be hunting cubs for the most part if you carry on your triumphs to the end.

I saw one of these veterans hunted down on Saturday, Jan. 26—witnessed the performance almost from find to finish, and by means of an intimate knowledge of road and country was able to take a forward or commanding position at many critical periods. Pleased with my own performance, how could I be otherwise than graciously appreciative of that of the men of action? Their doings, however—or perhaps I may be justified in limiting the encomium to the one in office, the huntsman—speak for themselves. With a strong fox, and on a bad scenting morning, he made a run and wound up with a kill.

Badby Wood the meet, Badby Wood the find. Amid a bevy of foxes, hounds and foot-people singled one, and chased and holloed him heartily—till, when three-quarters of an hour later he gained open country, the steel was out of the iron, and he was a half-killed fox. Else could he have fooled hounds according to his bent?—for even on the pretty green valley leading to Everdon they could barely foot him while he travelled with the wind. And when he turned upward to some fresh-ploughed fallows, it needed all of a professional's perseverance to hold the line good. It was done, however, and soon the chase dipped to Snorscombe and rose again to Everdon Stubbs—while the onlooker might pull up on the brow, to trace every movement, mark all the action, and almost follow

individual exploit, while the pursuit freshened and culminated in a horseshoe beneath his feet. It was plain to see how the zealous, the plodders—and these are the men who see sport—brisked up as they approached the wood; how the dawdlers, the easily discouraged, the ready talkers and the men of chalk, loitered and sauntered after. “Bad fox—not an atom of scent—bother Badby. I’ll wait for the afternoon. Where the devil’s my fellow with the luncheon?”—You might almost see them passing the formula one to another. And already they were pulling up, gathering into little knots on the edge of the covert—while at that very moment the birdseye above them lit upon a galloping whip (the smaller brother to him of that denomination now promoted) who raced on beyond, with cap on high, and shrill scream cutting the quiet air. Oh, for a seven-league thong! Get on! Hanging about—ye men of little worth and pudding heart—under the hill, are ye not? Under a cloud always will ye be till fox-hunting and you agree to recognise incompatibility. The plodders, on the other hand, are through, with the twanging horn and the silvery pack (for is not a pack of hounds darting under distant sunlight like nothing so much as a shoal of silver fish in the clear ocean?). And away into the valley goes the head of the chase with new vigour and fresh-acquired pace. They are more distant as they race down to the Everdon brook—(strong glasses would be useful now—and of course are securely at home). But there is a check, a flurry, a riding up and down on the part of the many—while a dozen or two are galloping onward, and the water is welcoming its own.

The huntsman, I learn, got in (and—this must be guarded in parenthesis—I do *not* learn that each and every man who found himself on the right side pulled up at once to offer his help, *and his horse*, to one of the most popular servants and workmen of the Shires. No, they were at liberty now—and every liberty they took, or Queen’s evidence is worth nothing. They had the pack all to themselves, and they rode round and ahead of it—and swore delightedly by their water-jumpers. Indeed,

that the position of hounds and hard riders had become inverted, to a degree that would have gladdened a cynic from the ploughs, was at this moment apparent enough from the eyrie above Everdon—where, as Babes in the Wood, sat the child taking notes and a ragged infant whom he had impressed into his service as gate-opener).

But, surely, business was afoot as the cluster thickened and closed up, and Newnham Village was reached. There were whips galloping round a willow bed and the village outskirts; there was a baying of hounds, a sudden rush inwards, and hark, who-whoop, a finish, and the cry of victory. “Excellent sport,” they said: they forgave the wood and its first half-hour, they ignored the dribble and uncertainty of the next, and they piled encomium on the final thirty minutes. “Were there ever such hounds?” Oh, yes; often. But “was there ever a prettier country? I say, old fellow, what were you doing at the brook? You should have seen my new horse cock his ears and go for it. He made nothing of it, and even Goodall got in.”

Now, the afternoon was all different; and a galloping road put all this in view, too. A turn round Staverton Wood and its planted vicinity occupied ten minutes. And then we started level—hacks and pony traps along the turnpike—the pack flying parallel—John doing pilot over a strong country, Mrs. Craven (may I be permitted to testify) giving a distance to all comers, and the rest spread out. It took only ten minutes from covert to kill. But he was a wicked old fox, with scarcely a tooth in his head, and he paid the penalty.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

THEN Monday's run with the Grafton was also admirably suited to the movements of one who essayed to see sport through the saddening medium of road and harness. And this is meant by no means to convey a slur upon the merits of the run itself.

It is easy to understand that if hounds follow a figure of 8, and intersecting roads are only frequent and convenient enough, they need seldom be long out of sight of those who would save distance and pace on the macadam. So it was now—the better for me, and the better for all second horsemen, worth their salt. I should be sorry to hint that any of these belted squires do *not* attain to so meagre a valuation ; but then, whereas a proper second horseman is acknowledged to be worth his very weight in gold, we know not to what price the Salt Syndicate may shortly raise the humbler article. And indeed the worthies in question do vary considerably in point of excellence. One of these days we shall see them all marshalled under authority, and moved *by road* from point to point—or they will have to be left at home altogether—or they will have to carry a special licence bought from the administrators of the Damage Fund.

Monday's was an excellent hunt, in spite of its curly course—nay, it probably afforded ten times the amusement it would have done had it been all straight, or even all fast. It contained beautiful, and continuous, hound work that could be seen by everyone, at times and at most times—at times by him who drove the inner line ; at most times by all who would keep galloping on, taking advantage of inside turns or riding religiously to the pack. There was no discomposing wind ; there was no blinding sun. The note of hounds, or the happy scream of the hedge-cutter, the ploughman, or of the villager “doing his bit o' hunting afoot”—and each of whom was privileged in turn to view the red rover as he passed—were plainly to be heard a mile away, while at double that distance horses could be easily discerned rising at their fences, and the work of the glancing pack could readily be followed. As the most poetical of modern prose writers and of modern sportsmen wrote, it was a day that in England's winter “means a green and grateful earth ; a sky of dappled clouds, serene and motionless, edged here and there with gold ; a sleeping fragrance of vitality only waiting for the spring.” It was a day

to be out of doors and to live; to be vigorous and active, if might be—and, above all, to be riding to hounds.

They had met at Adstone, and had been on their way to draw the coverts of Canons Ashby, when, near the latter place, a fox jumped out of a stubble field, and the hunt began. For twenty minutes they went very fast, but for ten, I am told, there were gateways to help them from grass field to grass field—though afterwards men found all the big jumps they wanted. Running southward for a couple of miles, they crossed the East and West Railway; then, leaving Plumpton Wood within a left-hand loop, swung round it and Adstone to regain Ashby and its wood. They had been at work for some forty minutes by the time they came through the last-named covert—and very rosy and well contented did the near pursuers appear, as they clustered after the huntsman, and gave the lady pack all the room he needed for them. Grave and preoccupied, however, as is fitting and usual with men intent on letting never a chance slip them, never a false turn beguile, never a mistake hinder them, never a moment of apathy spoil the memory they mean to hug to their bosom this night. Men thus settled and in earnest seldom go wrong—in the brief but absorbing task of riding a run. Nine times out of ten in such cases our failures are to be connected with flurry at starting, or with culpable carelessness between times. Thus it is that a huntsman is very, very seldom out of a run—though, like many of the best hounds of his pack, his presence is often all the more valuable because it is not constantly prominent.

Three converging roads, round the apex of which the line now circled—in place of continuing forward for Preston Capes—brought the scene charmingly within reach of a tolerable roadster, and allowed the whole following of the chase to join the front. The green lower-land (it is hardly a valley) from here to Maidford Village was now the arena, pleasantly visible from the road that follows the ridge. They found some ugly fences here; or why did the little crowd several times

break up, apparently to ride directly away from hounds? In the clear air methought I caught distinctly a brown form flitting across the wide pasture next in front of hounds. They turned to his very footsteps—so I felt comforted. I had viewed their fox, tired, probably, and nearly run to death. So the lump that had choked me while the music was rippling near and while old comrades, all aglow, were lancing across the road, so near I could see their eyes sparkle, gave way to a chuckle of satisfaction and a chirrup that started the pony at speed for Maidford Village. Arrived there, it was found that hounds had reached the wood just beyond. Thence they went through Seawell Wood—some say changed foxes on the way—and ran to ground on the railway embankment by Plumpton Wood. Already the run had lasted for nearly two hours; and had furnished fun, and enough, for grateful and satisfied sportsmen by the score.

A ROUGH DAY WITH THE GRAFTON.

RUDE and boisterous were the elements on Monday last, Feb. 4; but if the spell of happy weather had been abruptly broken, the spell of fine sport was by no means yet completed and booked to the past. A “disturbance” had reached us from over the Atlantic; a polar wind had stepped in to assist in our discomfort; and forthwith our fickle little island threw aside its make-believe spring, to resume its more seasonable, but far less becoming, garb of winter cold and wild.

The Grafton met on a lofty ridge—so it seemed to those who rode or drove up to Preston Capes from the Daventry direction, and who in a blinding snowstorm (one of a series that enlivened the day) essayed first to find their hunters, then to mount them. Happy was he—and happy the horse of him—who reached the scene at the latest possible moment; thus avoiding exposure such as no constitution short of that of the weathercock of Stornoway could hail with any pleasure. The fierce storms, however, were of tolerably brief duration—and possessed only a degree of pene-

tration that good leathers, a good habit, and a good circulation might easily laugh to scorn. And between times the sun would shine out, a rich blue sky would beam forth, and the whole heaven frame itself into a warm apology for the rudeness just done.

The woods beneath the place of meeting were drawn during a very brief interim of calm. But, while a weak fox was chased into the Fawsley Shrubberies and there killed, a far more vulgar and uncompromising condition of weather prevailed. In fact, a heavy snowstorm was raging—and the only thing that could without difficulty be discerned was a very pronounced longing on the part of everyone to retire homewards as soon as self-respect, or opportunity, would allow.

Not so a quarter of an hour later, when great Badby Wood was set alive. The field—about 100 to-day as against 300 on the Friday before (though for comparison sake, and as a comment aside, I am free to assert that on the Friday in question a full third of the number who trod the turf round the township were, very properly, townsmen. The lesser crowd of to-day were very hunting men, equally hunting ladies, and regularly hunting farmers—and these were all. Deduce what moral you like—but ask not me to wield the pen of controversy. Rather prove to me if further damage was done to-day, in two average runs, than would find a single carpenter work for a week—and I will wager you his wages for the sake of the County Infirmary).

The Badby Wood fox took the drift of the storm clouds for his index ; and with both sheets aft cut the Fawsley Estate by way of the House and the Preston Coverts—a line of grass, of gates, and of small woods, altogether in contrast with what the other side of the lordship provided, after luncheon. Down the wind there wasn't *half* a scent. I could see that—when, with the cunning begotten of more seasons than I dare reckon, and more mistakes than I shall ever have time or wish to recall, I sank the wind and remained on the Fawsley uplands—preferring my own meagre society for half an hour (with such extraneous aid as was forthcoming from a wicker basket and a fat cigar case) to a tolerable

certainty of being within hearing of a find, but of seeing nothing afterwards while I should be driving eastward or westward to find a way to follow round. Here there was soon signal enough to convince me that at least a fox—if not a man-eating tiger of fierce degree—was abroad—or else that Fawsley House was afire. The screams that came from the neighbourhood of the mansion were enough to prove one of two things—viz., either (1) that fox-hunting is the dearest joy that comes to the agricultural population of Northamptonshire, or (2) that this county has a vast starving majority tramping the fields on the chance of a luckpenny. That the second supposition is foolish as it is far-fetched it would need only a single glance at the “foot-runners” to prove. A jollier, better preserved, heartier lot of good fellows never wore shoe-leather than these keen skirmishers, ready to fling a gate or to answer a question, for the love of sport and because they are English. Don’t talk to *me*, querulous one, about foxhunting being the rich man’s play. I tell you it is the poor man’s recreation, and comes next to his food, at least in the bonny Midlands—and *I* see a deal more of the inside of the game now that my lines are cast in hard places, *i.e.* the road—now that I am pinioned, a “runner,” and one who reads as he runs.

Well, I and the skirmishers were in capital position now. Reynard ran round us—merely sheering off to the shade of the hill coverts in response to the clamorous welcome that saluted him. It was obvious that hounds could make no pretence of really driving him; and when at length they rose the Preston hill it seemed they would dribble away into space, disappear tamely towards Ashby, and leave us to make our respective ways to public or Penates. But there was something better in store. Fortune and self-consideration had brought us to a halt on one of the highest points of the rolling greensward, but under the lee of a small plantation and under the full glow of the intermittent sun. Below and directly in front lay the little wood of Ganderton, in a green flat valley intersected by two streams of water—the second and larger gleaming yellow in the sunshine—

while Hinton Gorse filled in the vista at some three miles distance. Crossing the belt of plantation leading to Ganderton, horsemen could be seen closing upon hounds—gaily to leave the lesser brook behind them. Closer still were they gathered as hounds emerged beyond the yellow water—but suddenly now did the movement and the order change. One, two, three are over—while the spray flies up like the sudden spouting of a whale on the starboard bow—another and another—a school of them, spouting or splashing all of a row. Misfortune or sympathy are checked on the bank—while success flies onwards, singly, in doublets, or even in triplets, but certainly not in mass. And, mark ye, how they gallop when over! Surely the pack must be racing now! And it is only afterwards we get to understand that this sudden access of speed was merely as it were, the natural let-off of delighted spirit, the outcome of victory, the spurt of exuberance. Don't I know it? Don't you, reader, who have been weak enough ever to permit such sensations as vanity, competition, or pride of place to linger in your heart—of course when I, and you, were younger? For alas, ambition and ardour, they tell us, have nothing to do with grey hairs or bald heads. Then it must be something else (what is it?) that pushes maturity into the front rank so consistently wherever hounds are ridden after, in the shires. And we know the opposite, too, do we not—the surge of the water into ears and eyes, the pang of disappointment far worse than the drenching, the angling for bridlereins, the diving for stirrup leathers, the helpless stupidity of a half-drowned horse, and the vapid shallowness of our subsequent and carefully prepared explanations?

Let me hinder you no longer. There was a way round, as there always is. Otherwise the man who never jumps a fence would not be able so often to testify to “as fine a run as I ever saw.” So we will go round, and imagine ourselves at Hinton Gorse, whither some forty minutes had brought fox and hounds. And the next thing we see of them is at Charwelton Osierbed, where they are seeking another. The black clouds are gathering again; the north wind is rising once more; but a jolly fox

flings into the breeze and laughs at the snowflakes, which make men and women weep and shake their heads. Was it for this incapacity, I wonder, that so many of them were brought to book—in other words, to muddy earth—in the sharp cheery half-circle round Charwelton Village to Fawsley, where the fences are all twice laid and the ditches are double. Providence, or the Roman dynasty, has directed a broad turnpike road to pass through Charwelton to Daventry—and this makes the gallery now, while the performers fly alongside, in excellent and most obliging taste. Two greys are obviously giving the time, for the pit-pat of each double jump; while the pack drive into the storm, and tax galloping powers to the utmost. The one is but a pony, ridden, if I mistake not, by a farmer; but he has evidently the faculty of both pace and prowess. Then Captains Riddell and Atherton, and surely a lady or two, are flanking or following Beers through the tall bullfinches. I wish I were there. It looks so easy—and a “double” never means a real turnover! Holloa—what is that? Why, the other grey—the best and best-proved hunter in all Northamptonshire, Mr. Walton’s immortal old horse, completely “rabbited”—prone on his back. “Rabbited” indeed—caught in a snare—wired! Oh infamy, oh devilment—you set your snares, not for the coward, not for the damage-monger, but for the first flight and for the pioneer pigeon!

Now they are into my road—and if I scream “Yoi over, you beauties”—who shall hear? I know it *is* over—and forrard to Fawsley, twenty-five minutes *hot*. And what a long story I’ve made of it! Put it down to the cherry brandy in the wicker-basket; assist me with it, and save me next Monday.

THE RUN OF THE SEASON ON HEARSAY.

HERE is its outline, plain and unvarnished, but reliable to the letter. The epitome may be contained in the words “An eight mile point, over the very cream of the country. Time, fifty-

five minutes—almost straight—with Goodall's usual kill at the finish."

On Wednesday afternoon, then (never mind the morning, though they do say that the Cotesbach Brook has since been the means of creating a new fondness for watergruel in more than one fair home), they found a right good fox in Lilbourne Gorse, as you shall see. (No time for comment—nor is there much to hand for this post.) He broke towards Mr. Muntz's house; but turned to the left before he reached the Watling Street road—evidently over the ground that for one year formed the scene of the Rugby Chases. Then straight to Crick Covert—ye gods, what a line, and obviously all the wire was down. Within one field of the gorse, he turned to the left, and made for the wooded knoll known as Cracks Hill—where he was viewed close in front of hounds. The latter dwelt but little time on the hill; but crossed the lane leading to Yelvertoft, and ran on as if for Winwick Village. Bearing off a trifle to the right, however, they went on over a fine line of country between Winwick and West Haddon—rising the hill and crossing the Guilsborough road, with their heads towards Ravens-thorpe village. Just beyond the next bottom, they—for the first and only time in the run—hesitated a moment. But Goodall, catching a view of his fox, held them on; and they ran up to the road between West Haddon and Buckby Folly. While hounds crossed it, and for a few fields ran parallel—the field generally being very glad to take advantage of the road—for by this time horses had in most cases begun to cry enough. So with their fox; for now he sank the hill, as though he meant to reach the covert of Vanderplank, but, his powers failing him, he crept up towards Long Buckby Village, lay down in the ditch of one of the large grass fields before reaching it—and here they pinned him. "As good a hunt as anyone could wish to see—hounds doing their work entirely of themselves, and their fox never very far in front of them. The line was a splendid one" (as indeed is easily recognisable). "Many of the horses were very tired, and no second-horses were obtainable,

as the line was so straight, and there were few helping roads. Though the country was almost all grass, it rode rather sticky after rain and snow, and so gave hounds a better chance than they might otherwise have enjoyed. A good many people saw the run ; for, although there was constant jumping and no little pace, hounds never really raced away from their field ; and the obstacles were never more than a fair hunter could negotiate." This is how a practised and excellent judge puts it—and his words convey the idea of a delightful run that will be talked of through the season and into the summer. The remarkable straightness of the line taken by this fox is apparent from the fact that it is difficult to make it more than ten miles as the hounds ran.

SADDLE AGAIN.

A FAR deeper hold on the minds of all who joined the Grafton hounds on Monday, Feb. 18, than any thought of the day's sport, had the news just bruited of Lord Penrhyn's resignation. The step was totally unexpected—at least by the bulk of his field—and sadly aghast were they when the blow came home to them. Surely the withdrawal from office of no Master of Hounds in England at the present time could excite more heartfelt and widespread regret. It is not merely that men have learned to be grateful for his liberality, and sensible of the superb completeness with which he directs the Hunt, but there has grown up among them a warm, almost tender, appreciation of the courtesy dealt forth so thoughtfully, yet so spontaneously, to all—an appreciation that it seems hard indeed should be disturbed. More than that, the while their feelings are considered (an indulgence none the less welcome that all plead guilty to being sinners in turn) their sport is cared for, and, as far as may be, ensured by a master hand. The Grafton Hounds have never shown better sport than under Lord Penrhyn ; and assuredly the Grafton field have never looked up to a more popular Master.

To turn to the day and its sport: Monday was warm and still, by no means the two most insignificant attributes of a hunting day. We only go out in a brisk North-Easter because it is a duty; because other fools besides ourselves are ashamed to stay at home; because, forsooth, we are restless; because we have a horse fit to go, and every day's hunting costs on a very moderate calculation at least a tenpound note; because, perhaps, our new habit (with, of course, a waistcoat entirely novel in colour and original in cut) has just come down—anything, in short, but because it is joyful and amusing to seek sport in a wind that completely bars it, and that pinches and pierces us till we could cry aloud. Yes, Monday was altogether pleasant—at least, so it seemed to one who for many weeks had looked vainly, wistfully, now and again even bitterly, towards a saddle as a starving man might towards a throne. The air may possibly have been heavier and warmer than horses could inhale with freedom; for after twenty minutes' galloping they panted and perspired remarkably.

The meet was Preston Capes, but no fox was roused until well after midday. The Fawsley estate is widespread; and so are its foxes, after being industriously looked up by two packs of hounds for four months past. But they are there even if odd nooks and corners have now to be sought out. As I have noted before, the presence of hounds in this neighbourhood puts a very severe tax upon—no, that is not the term, gives a thorough oiling to the machinery of—agriculture. It takes all the grating, all the roughness, off a week's labour; and the wheel of work runs much smoother and happier on the other five days in consequence. There was a cluster to-day on the hilltop between Woodford and Charwelton that might suggest anything between a prize fight and a statute fair (by which we of Northamptonshire understand the ancient festival of Mops, and accept it as one of the rites instituted and bequeathed by the Danes; but which the outside world, who know nothing of hiring servants in the market-place, believe to be a mere fable of the past). Nor were they gathered in

vain, as has since been told and toasted in every public for miles round. A great rusty fox jumped forth at their very feet—and the next moment the heavens were cleft with the uproar. For once the clamour did good service. It drove the game across hounds, and set them going open-mouthed, in view. Some may say, let hounds start cool, undisturbed, unexcited. I venture to refer back to many a thrilling gallop and successful run, and to meet such maxim with a tempered contradiction. No, let them start with their bristles up, if you can. Let them settle when they must—but for Heaven's sake, give them room to do it. With their blood afire, they will do their best. Cold blood never killed a fox, any more than cold blood ever cut out the work over a strong country. But I did not mean to pass from hound to man—though excitement is the motive power with both, restrained and modified by instinct in the one, by reasoning and self-command in the other. For one run we see worked up to, there are twenty we see made at the start. The credit of performance belongs all to the former case, and is more often due to the huntsman. Hounds will achieve the latter. It is for him merely to set the machine in motion, to watch it going, and bide his time.

I don't fancy Monday was quite a scenting day. It was muggy and close—conclusive, if one dare risk even a guess upon scent, of ready evaporation. But a fox, never five hundred yards to the good and with some twenty couple all in a fury for his brush that just now swept their very faces, *must* leave a scent—where the turf is old, and that turf is renowned for its holding properties. So they raced—which hackneyed term here applied means that in a level pack the tail hounds never caught the front, till a first quarter-hour brought them to the verge of Badby Wood. Ah, it was sweet to see them drive across the great spreading pastures—they rounding a gentle curve, we striking a bee line on the upper ground, by means of a line of wide gates that I for one never before regarded quite so heartily, so gratefully. We always accept them, as you know: and are well aware that we could not

cross Fawsley quickly without them. Now I could well realise the paradise they open to age, to crippledom, to the thousand accidents that may leave a man still fond of foxhounds, but very careful of his own safety. I tell you, Sir, this gallop was luxury, rank revelry, sheer delight. I speak as a fool, and as a cripple. But I speak for myself; and I wish you nothing better than that it brought half the warmth to your heart that it did to mine.

We careered to Fawsley House, and past it to the big covert—our fox in plain view, not 300 yards ahead. The mile of woodland was threaded in another five minutes; then, more slowly, the run went forward by the brookside to Everdon. And only at Everdon did jumping begin, or rather the necessity for it—for, though apparently at least one good man had already clad himself in a muddy coat, there were some scores



who like myself saw the whole run, bar the one quarter of a mile while we rounded the brook, without being committed to a single fence. The little Everdon Brook came in sight at the exact spot whereat the Pytchley crossed it some weeks ago,

when they killed their fox at Newnham Village. It runs through some pretty meadows; is in itself but a neat jump that may be taken at a stand; and yet, given the opportunity, many horses invariably prefer to jump into it. I stayed only to see a grey horse splash the water aloft, and a brown disappear from view, while a black went on with a clever recovery wrapped round his neck. I wanted to get on after hounds; so, not being paid to make fun of other people in misfortune which I dared not share, I left a scene that I am told lasted at least twenty minutes longer, and galloped in excellent company to the nearest bridge. This took us beyond the village, and up to Everdon Stubbs. By the time we were through the little wood, hounds were rising the hill as if for the bigger covert of Stowe. But their fox could do no more. The first twenty minutes had beaten him: after that he could never shake himself clear of hounds—and they killed him in fifty, the point being some five and a half miles. Of a large field the following were some few: Lord Penrhyn, Miss Alderson, Mr. and Mrs. Blacklock, Mr. and Mrs. Craven, Mrs. Hunt, Mr. and Mrs. Knightley, Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, Mrs. Whaley; Lords Capell, Euston, Alfred Fitzroy, Fielding; Sir Rainald Knightly, Sir W. Humphrey; Revs. V. Knightley, Evans; General Magennis, Major Palmer; Captains Blackwood, Close, Atherton, Jacobson, Greville, Faber, Orr, Riddell; Messrs. Atherton, Apthorpe, Burton Byass, G. Campbell, Clark, Bulwer Flower, Fuller, J. Fitzwilliam, Douglas Pennant, Corbett Holland, Hartopp, Mildmay, Grazebrook Bromwick, Key, Colledge, Goodman, Oldrey, Manning, Jennaway, Russell, Waring, Watson, Waterfield, Roper, Palmer, Sheppard, Parsons, Whitton, Scriven, Watts, &c.

CROSS COUNTRY ONCE MORE.

WINTRY beyond all that could be held appropriate to the final week of February was the look-out on Monday the 25th, at the hour that men (and I suppose the purer sex too) mostly choose

for their morning tub, and for seeking such signs as the window and the weather-glass may afford them to decide how they shall be clad for the day. Extra flannel and as much of it as waist-coat would hold, or habit would stretch to, was the unmistakable bidding of snow-hidden fields, of a weathercock glued to N.E., of a black sky and a lowering glass, on both these mornings. And even then the blue tint, that year by year becomes on most human features (however ordinarily hearty) a more positive index of weakening circulation and of sensitiveness to cold, had a very general hold upon public appearance at the covert-side.

The Grafton came to Adstone, allowed a fair margin of time for the weather to improve (of which, however, the weather was distinctly slow to avail itself), found very few people there to meet them, but picked up stragglers and recruits during the next two hours. A poor morning's sport was before them—though for months past their indifferent days have been few and widely separated. What might have happened in the later evening, from Seawell Wood, it is impossible to say. On the way thither Beers met with a fall that completely stunned him, and hounds were taken home.

Tuesday, February 26th, was chosen by the North Warwickshire for a meet at Rugby. From 11 to 11.15 a general and determined struggle was enacted between the rival forces of chill and cherry brandy—resulting in a pronounced and welcome victory on the part of the latter. Mr. Ashton and his staff then rode into the crowded market place; and before chill had a chance of reasserting itself, the order was given for hounds to move off. This they did by a route that eventually led to Clifton on Dunsmore, followed by a prolonged train of riders that fairly rivalled that of a Pytchley Wednesday—and that at once set one wondering how it were possible, in case of a run beginning before the long column should have deployed into line, for more than one-twentieth of its number to see one yard of such run. Of course they wouldn't; and as a matter of fact they (or I ought to say *we*) often don't—for by no means every

run begins from a covert-side or when we have all cried out that we are now ready. Even then, you may add, we are most of us to be found riding after coat-tails rather than at the tail of the pack. And this is the fortune of war in the Midlands. Believe me, sirs, you will find that hunting here is a very over-rated amusement. There isn't room. So say those who should know ; and Unlimited Emigration hither is to be discouraged. On the other hand, so many people have brothers, sisters, cousins—and, I was nearly adding, sweethearts, but that wouldn't be true—resident in the country, whom they must perforce come and see. It may be that the visit is only for a day, but for that day they must bring a horse—or what attraction can the visit offer? As well trip it to a grouse moor without a gun. The reasoning is false, of course ; but it is a vein of reasoning that has been acted on for many a generation : and ephemeral visitors there will be, especially in spring time, so long as hunting is welcomed, and whether their hosts own the land, farm the land, or pay their footing handsomely. But “on the other hand,” with which apology the above sentence began, is a gate to a field of argument far too wide. As well ask me to explain the Elysium of upper servitude as contained in the phrase “settle down and take a quiet public,” or to suggest privacy and perfection of sport as embodied in “hunting a quiet pack of harriers” in a boot-making district. No need to continue the subject. It is under debate elsewhere—and that debate a very solemn one.

My sketch of Tuesday had only reached the little hand gate beneath Mr. Muntz's spinney—a point at which some of the big concourse may be struggling still, so insufficiently did the meagre exit serve, when horn and scream were calling them through. A fox that had been seen to enter the covert at daylight was now away whence he came ; and the lively lady pack wasted no time in darting after him. Sharp, *varmint*, little hounds are these—and very level withal. Wanting, of course, in the grand reach and classic forehand of the Grafton of yesterday ; but very neat, very active, and very keen. Mr. Lort

Phillips always expressed the highest possible appreciation of their powers of driving and hunting; and he certainly left the pack anything but the worse for his term of mastership. But of the run, or rather of the brief, brief scurry just inaugurated. Two fields brought us to the Watling Street road, about opposite Lilbourne Gorse; whereupon our fox took advantage of both bridges, to cross the railway and the river. He left the hamlet of Kittenthorpe (an outwork, as goes without saying, of greater Catthorpe) on his right, crossed the Rugby road, and dived into the Newton valley, with its well-kept meadows and its pretty trout-stream. There was a scent here; and the little ladies took hold of it with a will. A hundred to one on a run, as they swung over the well-cut brook and rose the hill for Coton—Mr. R. Leveson Gower proving each sturdy fence in advance of a hundred followers. Hounds dashed over a lane, while the rush came in with clatter and flounder that told loudly of the unexpected. Their fox had gone down it—and going down it slipped his pursuers effectually. That is to say, by the time his line was recovered, it was worse than lukewarm; and they could barely trace him past Cave's Inn to Shawell. But those minutes were very stirring, very jolly, and well placed.

THE BODDINGTON GALLOP.

A FRONT place, please, for the run of Saturday, March 2nd, when the Warden Hill Hunt did honour to Northamptonshire grass, and credit to the union of Bicester and Warden Hill. For, far from Bicershire proper (charming and varied as that shire may be) is found a tongue of fair country for which hounds are kennelled at Thorpe Mandeville. *Fair country*, did I say! The fairest, the sweetest-scenting strip that hounds can work over, and quite as strongly fenced as we care to find it—even now when not a bramble still boasts a leaf, and many a hedgerow is almost transparent. Nor is it treason to proclaim it thus; for it is so placed that you who are now at a

distance cannot slip down by train on a hunting morning, nor can you there pitch your tent—unless you do so very literally, for neither towns nor hunting-boxes are found near the spot. Attainable indeed it is by road from various out-quarters—remotest of all perhaps being the town of Bicester and the home kennels. You had only to follow the master's eye, looking back along the thickly-packed lane at Boddington Gorse, to satisfy yourself of that.

Boddington Gorse has been renowned throughout 1888 and 1889 for a veritable "Old Customer," who has shown a positive passion for the sport—an affection for good country and a delight in straight going—and who has seldom failed to be at home to the legitimate caller. A word as to locality. The Gorse is, as its name implies, a snug artificial covert. It is ensconced under Boddington Hill, beneath and in front of which lies an absolutely perfect valley—good enough to "carry a bullock to the acre" or a hundred flying horsemen to the same measurement. A mile on the right, looking downwards, is the village of Wormleighton; a mile to the left are Upper and Lower Boddington; another mile to the left is Aston Le Walls, above the basin of verdure; and yet another mile to the left is the wood of Red Hill. Imagine a bow. Let the string stretch from Wormleighton on the west, *via* Boddington Gorse and Lower Boddington Village, to Red Hill. Then for the run of the day follow the arc of the bow from Wormleighton to Red Hill; come back along the string; and you have it as nearly as possible. If you can be satisfied with a run that, with everything else absolutely good, has a double point thus—then Saturday's event should surely come up to your standard. Further, fit an arrow to the bow if you will, and the arrow shall represent the long narrow plantation, among the feathers of which old Reynard was found—while the shaft constituted a leading feature among the obstacles of the burst.

Boddington Hill for the time being was as Napoleon's wind-mill at Waterloo. It commanded the situation—more than that, it became the centre point round which the scene revolved.

And all England held no happier men than those mustered thereon from six parishes round.

The meet at Lower Boddington had been prolonged till twelve, that the frost might relinquish the ground, while Mr. Cowper's hospitality filled in the interim. Hounds, too, were there—"the big pack." How closely and sharply they did their work I crave leave to tell you presently. For the moment it is enough to learn of what blood these well-conditioned and in many instances shapely hounds are constituted. Several of the elder dogs are imports—the produce of the Belvoir, Warwickshire, and Blankney kennels, from which last (Lord Henry Bentinck's or Mr. Chaplin's strain) Lord Chesham brought in a strong and most valuable addition to his lady pack when, two or three years ago, Lord Lonsdale sold off. Some few of these were present to-day, together with a certain number of the bigger ladies of the old Bicester blood—to whom the younger dog hounds are chiefly akin.

So much for the hounds. This was no day on the flags. And now we come to the announcement—the Old Customer not at home. Sad indeed this. But rumour promised a fox, and we were taken southward to find him, along the arrow of plantation that was later to cause such confusion. Result—only the passage of two hundred unwilling jumpers where there was room for one at a time, to cross the said plantation.

Now back by Boddington Gorse, to seek elsewhere—when, breathless and hungry for his half-crown, a runner met the Master with "A fox just gone to the spinney, my lord—not five minutes since!" The spinney so called was a clump on Boddington Hill, continuing along the ridge to Priors Hardwick like a perch's comb of tall fir-trees, or as the feathers of the arrow we have assumed. How often is a travelling fox again seen or heard of? So we asked ourselves, to still expectancy and quell anticipation—till a hound opened, another and fourteen couple more! Better and better—a yell, a chorus of discord from voices ahead! Tally ho! out he came, the very rascal we had hoped to see an hour ago.

The Old Customer had little law given him; but he never looked for law any more than he expected quarter when his time should come—as come it was about to do. He had stretched his limbs; he had shaken his fur; his ear was cocked. His brush too was carried aloft, and he knew his ground too well to dream of trailing it in mud or loading it with clay during the struggle for life. For all that, he scuffled off in ungainly fashion when the whip met him face to face at the plantation end. The fallow field doubtless spoiled his action: and he was a bulldog rather than a greyhound fox—short in the neck and thick in the back. I can see him now, and I'll see him in my better dreams for many a month to come. He was furred like a Pomeranian, and his robe was a dark blood red.

Hounds came out in a mass, and in a mass they ran till the deed was done. Now to turn to ourselves. We were strung out at this moment four abreast, for four hundred yards and more along the plantation side. When the break-away crossed the van, we closed up and crowded up, a cloud of horsemen hovering on the hog's back, while the pack went as it were from under our feet. They were gone in the sunlight before we felt they had started. Leisurely and foolishly we clustered to the fringe fence that borders the green declivity leftward. A little hedge and a parapet beyond on which to land; so we frittered timidly over. Dear lady, dear lady, whoever you were, and if you will forgive me—'twas a little cruel, it couldn't have been *cunning*, of you to shriek "Wire," when you and a dozen more were safely poised beyond, and the wire after all was only on the ground! Your silvery alarm bell didn't stop, it only frightened us; and, with back upon saddle-croups, we slid and scrambled down this Devil's Dyke, to the road that leads from the Gorse to Prior's Hardwick. Thence we filed out by gap or gate, and knew we were on the great Wormleighton pasture, where gates are many and where fences at double distance are doubly grown. In this great open country three fields go to a mile, and the ridge-and-furrow rolls as deeply as

the Atlantic in its more peaceful mood. Hounds were gone, is all I can tell you—Blame me not, if I beg indulgence down the wicked hill, or crave a little time till warmth has released a rusted paddle.

A first forty-acre field has given play to such action as may serve the pressing need; and now the work, the fun, the struggle indeed began. But, alas, the next thing to note is a catastrophe—a trap, into which many of the best men of the Hunt (nay, of four Hunts) rode blindly, to become victims of their own undoing! The canal faced them, and the canal had a big staring bridge—open to all. Into it they galloped like elephants into a keddah, to be trapped and tamed and saddened. For hounds, that till this instant had headed for the Warwickshire covert of Watergall, now followed *their* noses to very different purpose; for they swung sharply to the left between a high bullfinch and the canal bank, and flew fast up the slope to Wormleighton Village. The huntsman alone of the bridge party perceived his mistake. The moment he missed hounds coming on he wheeled in his tracks, to dart round upon theirs. By this time all the left wing of the big battalion had flocked down upon the line of chase, and formed an ever-increasing flood flowing afterward. Thus up the broad green acres—gate leading to gate, and the pace all that men could raise, while hounds raced ahead as they can do where the hedges are open and widely intervalled. The village of Wormleighton was left just to the right. More great bullock pastures were beyond the road; but a still further leftward swing brought the scene on to very different ground, where incident and variety cropped up at every minute. Horses were by this time well warmed; men were wound up; and they darted over a first stake-and-bound with keen avidity—to land in a light fallow field, having as its farther boundary the long narrow spinney that runs from Bodington Gorse to Wormleighton Reservoir. Six horses almost together. The grey leading, Mr. Corbett's big black and Colonel Wodehouse's brown nearly touching each other in the air. All well over? No, Mr. Fabling down, but with them again as

they trooped into the broad double of the plantation-belt. Quite strong enough was the jump in : awkward and hindering was the jump out. You landed in among pine-trees, and ran your head into a wall of briars. Mr. Corbett had slanted off to the right, but with little better success, for he too was to be seen harboured helplessly among the timber, till young Cox (acting as first whip during Bonner's unlucky absence—and acting the part right sharply and well) came cruising down the trees and spotted an outlet good enough for the little black mare and her gratified following.

Meanwhile the Master and his section (the Master having already forgotten the pain and bruise of a badly-crushed leg) had pierced the bulwark on the left, and now came across the front in full swing—Mr. Beatty still leading, and a farmer, or some one in mufti (I wish I knew who) on a very miniature bay making a trio to Lord Chesham and the hog-maned black. Mrs. Whaley, too, joined in ; and the four sailed on, dipping in and out of the close ridge-and-furrow like seabirds on a chopping sea. The Old Customer was on familiar ground. So were we. Was not this the line, fence for fence (and all the easier no doubt for previous encounter), that we rode more than a year ago from Boddington Gorse ? But after the first few meadows, the wheels seemed to leave the ruts, *i.e.*, the gaps disappeared, and the country stood out in the full honest strength of which the Boddington farmers rightly boast. “Did you find it strong enough ?” I heard one of them query afterwards, with a laugh all over his jovial face. “Strong enough”—yes, indeed, but for the pace. And pace, somehow, never fails to bring the easiest places handy. Across the flat meadows (flat all but for their contrary ridge-and-furrow) scent burned brightly as ever, but the thick hedgerows rather hindered the eager, jostling pack. So there was time to pull, almost time to breathe—time enough, even, to allow of a good man dismounting to a broken gate. “Not bad for a first and only day with the Bicester.” This from Major Tomkinson, as he passed to the front on a tall striding bay, that to my eye looked like

Leicestershire rather than Cheshire. Three more fields after bridging the "canal feeder," and the lane was struck that connects Lower Boddington with Clayden or Cropredy. Jumping in from the left, they rode down it to the right—with the result that the right division plunged hotly among the left. The huntsman had already assumed position at the head; but a later than he, riding up from the rear and all furious still with memory of that hapless canal bridge, came into the lane with a final bound that nearly took Wilson and himself through the high black bullfinch beyond. The mealy bay steed knew better; but the impetus was *awful*, and for fifty yards down the lane the new-comer was supported only by the huntsman's warm embrace. (Is not "a pound a minute" below the value of a gallop like this? what say you, then?)

Forrard it is, too, as merrily as ever, right into the wind and up to the brook. Wilson, on the glorious brown mare Comedy, fairly flicked over it in his stride where little bushes fringed either bank; Mr. Faber, Mr. Boyle, and a small succession spun readily across at the same good place, or achieved the deep chasm at a less enticing spot. Then ensued refusals, and sudden confusion. But the road was close by (under the village of Aston Le Walls); hounds bent left to it—and here was Lord North already in position to "cheer on the thrusters," when Mr. Boyle upon Redskin (I am told, and can well believe, the best hunter in England, out of training) crashed a last great fence for very pastime, and the others galloped gladly through the open gateway beside him. In they trooped—all those with whose names I have made free, confident of good feeling and impelled by an occasion that does not come every day—with Mr. Grosvenor, Mr. W. Blacklock, Mr. W. Walton, and a few, not many, others to join the road party. And on went hounds, across the railway, and over a whole cluster of open drains only too well known to foxes and men, up to the wood of Redhill. Keeping downward beneath its lower edge, they ran its whole length before turning into the covert—forty-five minutes since the opening note.

This was the first part, and the quickest part. But there was no pause. The Old Customer was allowed no rest. Possibly he might have held forward to Eydon had the coast been clear; but having elected, or been forced, to enter the covert—where twice previously, if I mistake not, he had set up a substitute—they gave him no peace, but hustled him through and drove him forth again at the top. And so, by the way he had come he descended the red hill; but took ground more to the right as soon as he reached the railway; then, making his route under Lower Boddington Village, he recrossed the flat straight to the Gorse—hounds running heartily, if not quite so fast, as on the outward journey. There was a scent they couldn't leave; and they drove along it for blood. The world of foot-people on Boddington Hill shouted a pæan in his honour, and then, like so many sheep in a fox's path, set off one and all to run, while he staggered into the covert at their feet. Wilson galloped hounds a few hundred yards down the road, to set them on still better terms at his weary brush. They sent him one hot turn round the gorse, ousted him again to the same great pastures of Wormleighton, drove him across three of them—then held him in a double hedgerow—and, a minute later, the Old Customer was laid out upon the turf.

An hour and ten minutes it was, from when hounds first threw their tongues till the who-hoop went up in the still frosty air; and of that time the Old Customer had been called upon to do at least an hour at his best. Quicker, better hound work was never exemplified. They never threw up, and they never wanted help. (That moment's ready assistance in the road being only to clear them of the crowd.) We may have seen hounds go even faster, but very seldom, and for such time; and none but an exceptionally stout fox could have stood up so long. They were glued to him from start to finish.

PRAIRIE LIFE.

PRAIRIE life has many a hardship, many a shortcoming, and none too many recreations—indeed, I heard a cow-hand aver with solemn philosophy, as he held out his tin plate for a third helping from the cook's frying-pan, "A square meal is my only recreation in this country." The intensity of work, the struggle not to be "left"—to do a great deal with very little help and at least possible cost—these allow the regular worker who has chosen the prairie for his sphere of toil very scant leisure beyond his daily occupations, and certainly limit his capacity for extracting pleasure entirely to his vocations. It would be wrong to assert that only a loiterer can afford to be appreciative of the beauties of nature; but it is safe to assume that a man over-busy, pre-occupied, somewhat fatigued, perhaps sadly unsettled, derives less delight from their contemplation than he

who is as it were in training for the reception of passing impressions. All the poetry is out of such a man. His finer faculties are necessarily dormant. To put it plainly, his mind is for the time brutalised; and for a while he is on a level with a beast of burden, overtaxed, spiritless, joyless save at the sight of his food.

But such crushed condition of the mental powers under physical strain is happily only occasional, accidental, and temporary. There are other times when the contemplation of Nature, in its prairie aspect—the most inartificial of all its guises—is not only solacing, but invigorating: when the heart beats all the happier, the mind is refreshed, and thought becomes lighter, even sanguine. The cool sweet breeze, the rough but picturesque mountains, the fresh green foliage of the wooded valleys, and the bright verdure of the grassy slopes, act as a positive tonic to sense and manhood and to appreciation of life. The grasp of the rifle and the grip of the saddle then intuitively tighten, and lend themselves naturally to an Englishman's instinct.

Now, no one would kill a stag in May. The code of the country forbids it, we are aware: and the conscience of a sportsman rebels against such an act, you will say. Ah, yes! but "this is a free country" wherein no man may starve; and as for a sportsman's conscience, wait till that is dulled by a week on salt pork. Bacon, as we know too well, is *never* out of season—though we playfully vary its denomination, now as "chicken," now as "meat," now as "hog." Why then fresh-meat? I fancy you have no close time for beeves or even for muttons, have you, my gallant gentlemen who sit at home at ease, and wash down your juicy steak with Perrier Jouet, or your cutlet with Lafitte, while we aggravate our thirst with alkali water or commingle our salted rations with muddy coffee?

With some such thoughts and in some such frame of mind, I saddled old Smoke for a saunter, in the sunny afternoon of yesterday—soon to find myself crossing familiar ground, while

trifles of the past and sundry troubles of the present chased each other, only to lessen and vanish quickly under the influence of surroundings. It was the first stroll of the present year for Smoke and me—Smoke having acted the part of shooting pony for five previous years, during which he had carried me on the Big Horn Mountains and the Rockies, and had chased down the last elk of Mizpah Creek. Apropos of this latter episode comes in a tragic sequence. One Bronson had been my hunting comrade in that wintry chase, when the snow lay frozen crisp with the thermometer 40° below zero at night, and we had shared our buffalo-robies against its intensity. Jim Bronson was a New Yorker; but had served a long novitiate in the West. Nothing came amiss to him, from cow-punching to log-hewing. Brought up to the sale of hardware, he had adapted himself with true Yankee versatility to very different occupations. He could make his own windlass and dig a well, or would tie a flour bag round his waist and fry buckwheat cakes, while another man would be thinking out his preliminaries. And all the time he would whistle and sing till one quite envied the little fellow his wondrous spirits.

Last winter Bronson, having fixed up all that was needed about his own ranche—where a few cows, a few mares, and his homestead (some thirty acres broken against the spring that was never to come to him) constituted his personal wealth—then betook himself to earn his forty dollars a month assisting his neighbour. His wages were to be for hauling lumber, *i.e.*, boards, from the neighbouring sawmill; and through December he went to work with his team—daylight just allowing him to make one trip per diem to the mill and back. Gaily and happily, under such circumstances as would have chilled the heart of most men, he plodded daily through the snow with his horses, while whistle and voice rang cheerily out, to the shrill accompaniment of the wagon wheels (whose quaint singing as they cut through the frozen snow could be heard a mile through the clear, still atmosphere).

Of all circumstances that try the teamster none are so precarious as taking heavy loads down the steep slopes, on the summit of which the pine timber is found. In winding round the gulches and wash-outs, the wagon has constantly to run at a slant; and the greatest judgment and experience are required to guard against a "tip-over"—a mishap which will occur occasionally even under the deftest management. It then becomes a matter of pulling the wagon back on to its wheels, replacing the load piece by piece, and, as the lumber-wagon of the country is not easily hurt, very little harm usually results beyond an hour's extra work and one more page in the driver's record of "things better not said." He himself has probably on such occasions been walking on the upper ground; and the wagon accordingly rolls away from him—while, as to the team, it is well used to such little incidents, and stands quietly, until unhitched for the next move in the game.

One day, however, Bronson's natural caution would seem to have deserted him. The wagon was slipping alarmingly on the sloping and glassy road (for wherever a wagon has once been is termed a road in this primitive region): his previous journeys had been made without mishap; and he was anxious to reach home while daylight lasted. So, as the load swung and quivered and the balance was threatened, he lent himself in over-confidence to a course that might have found favour with a "tenderfoot," but was altogether out of keeping with the practice of an old teamster—one who had hauled loads in all weathers for years past, and who had even driven the Deadwood mail (of Buffalo Bill notoriety) through a whole season of winter nights, across the almost trackless mountains. He walked on the down side of his load, pushing, and supporting it to maintain the equilibrium. An extra jerk, a heavy roll—the load of planks swung over: the poor lad's strength and activity availed nothing against the ponderous weight—and in a moment he lay under the mass, his limbs crushed and pinned from waist to feet. Miles from any house; no hope of search before morning—or even then, for he had more

than once remained the night at the sawmill camp—winter darkness coming rapidly on, the thermometer already many degrees below zero, and numb Death already gripping him by the waistbelt! What plight more awful? What misery more intense? Whither in his agony thought carried him shall never be known. Conjecture we easily how a life's course would well up, how all that was dear—all that was now finished—would thrust itself forward—appealingly, piteously, despairingly. "My God, my God, is this the end?" would be the poor sufferer's helpless wail. His pockets held a pencil. This was between his teeth the next day. But the pockets, every one of them, were turned inside out in evident quest of paper—that a line, a word, a farewell might go home to those dear ones back-East. His whip was in his hand; and its long lash of raw hide suggested at all events an end to this hopeless torture. A double twist formed his death-cravat. The coil was drawn tight round his windpipe with the nervous fingers of a desperate man: the same sure knots were tied that in years previous he had taught me would hold a broncho in his wildest struggles—and he strangled his life out. Who shall dare to blame him?

But back to the brighter present—the line of hogbacked hill, the handy little Winchester, and the thirst and thought begotten of bacon for dinner and bacon for breakfast. The rough red "bad lands" sloped right and left to meet the green valley on either hand. Deep fissures, broken gulches, rocky chasms yawned in wild extravagance of shape and colouring adown the ridge side. "Just the place for blacktail," I muttered—and the last syllables were still between my lips when, popping along the divide ahead, three tufts of cotton went glancing—each in rear of a lusty deer. Blacktail they call them, *lucus a non*, because their tails are white. As a matter of distinction, the white-tailed deer have tails twice as long and twice as white—so let that pass. The wind was blowing half a gale along the ridge, from them to me; there was still a chance of getting up to them—and a fat buck might

yet adorn the larder. As they turned a corner and were hid to view, I had the spurs into Smoke, and reached the point ere they should have gone barely a hundred yards beyond. Peeping quietly round the rocks—there they were, already grazing and apparently undisturbed. The three pairs of long ears went up, however, as Smoke walked into view—rider having meanwhile slipped down on the near side, saddle-rope in hand. Deer seldom mind a riderless horse: so Smoke and they stood calmly gazing at each other while I crawled to the end of the thirty-foot rope and carefully appraised the deer-meat (no, sir, *not* venison. There is no such word in Western phraseology.) An old family doe. She won't do, for reasons

heavy and obvious. The big buck is a fine fellow—tough probably, and with his horns in velvet of course. The third is verily a "Little Billee, young and tender. Little Billee. Yes, let's eat he." And a downhill shot took the yearling between the shoulder blades, and handsomely made meat of him. I felt like a man who has committed charity—and that charity the best of all, for it began at home, where six bacon-fed and blood-thirsty mortals awaited my return.

But the fun of the evening was not yet ended. To the crack of the shot there rose on the next hill the flowing manes and mobile necks of three startled horses ; and in a moment more the whole of the little bunch—five head and a foal—were on the brow, gazing about them in fear and curiosity. (A favourite plan, by the way, amid rough land, is for the horse-seeker to fire a shot from his revolver—whereupon any horses within hearing will certainly peep hurriedly over the peaks.) The bunch was readily recognised. It contained a galloping mare with her first foal. They had already evaded capture for a fortnight ; and it became a point of honour that they should now join the herd at home. Horses are easily stalked—however wild—and the broken ground now favoured close approach. Moreover, once quietly ridden round, they will always submit to inspection—until the time arrives for moving them on. Then may the difficulties—at all events the excitement and the struggle—begin. A mare with a young foal will do all she knows to distance, or double on, her pursuers. She will start at a tangent for the roughest brakes, where she may before have found shelter and evaded pursuit ; and fast as she may stride over rocks and scrub, the little one will keep pace almost under her flank. Away like the wind, that flings her wild mane in the air, and that waves her long tail level with her back. With a snort of defiance she is fifty yards to the good ere your spurs can go in—while her comrades swing round to her signal and dash off at her heels. Now you must ride and ride at their very tails—for once they get clear of you on this tumbled-up country you will surely never hit quickly the beaten trails by which alone the cattle and horses and deer can travel the bad lands. Now she dashes for the wildest and most dangerously broken ground, wherein a goat only could crawl, and crawl slowly. She must not reach this, or the laugh will be all her's and pursuit soon hopeless. Head her you must, at all hazards. There is just room to pass, just space on the ridge to do it. As you rattle past her the little horse under you catches the infection, and strains every nerve, as an

Arab going in at a boar. He seems, in his dash over rocks and crannies, as if he had four spare legs under him—so quickly does he change his stride, fling his leaps, and vary his foothold. Now you are past her—up flourishes the little Winchester to arm's length, while a shout goes home to her ear and Smoke stops short in a single stride. The wild mare is turned: and

her head is now for the green and smoother valley, where she and her "outfit" may be managed more easily. Still "she scours the plain like a creature winged, I swear," and Smoke has little respite while he maintains such terms as will prevent her again doubling for the bad lands. So down the rough hillsides and on to the prairie-dog towns (like so many rabbit warrens) beneath—the pace never slacking, but reins loose on neck and everything left to the little horse's honesty. As a matter of fact these prairie-bred horses scarcely ever put you down. Even when going at apparently top speed, they retain such command over themselves that they stop, wheel, jump, or drop quietly down a declivity—never hesitating, but moving by a quick unerring instinct that never fails them. You must of

course leave all to them when embarked on a headlong gallop over such ground : and depend on it they will not betray you. The main difficulty is to sit tight—in an English saddle I mean, not in an American “cow saddle” with its great mainmast of a pommel standing up before you. An excellent saddle, too, is the latter—for rough work and for roping (by which is meant lassoing)—but not the saddle for a horseman to begin upon at forty, while again the lasso is more for the cattle business than for horsework. Well—we drove in the wild mare, felt all the better for the gallop, and took a packhorse for the “deer-meat” in the cool of the morning.

THE NEW FOREST IN SPRING.

FOX-HUNTING.

FOR pleasant springhunting amid charming surroundings give me the New Forest. "I speak of things as I found them," and base my impressions on this hypothesis.

If you don't fish and you don't race; if you care for hunting for its own sake, and dislike idleness for its consequences, what are you to do during the latter weeks of April? The New Forest answers the question. You may there hunt six days a week, with a very moderate outfit of horses; you may see hounds run hard with fox and deer, and you spend your days amid forest scenery, that is none the less beautiful, none the less appreciable, because her Most Gracious Majesty is good enough to keep the roads perfect, and the turf ridings firm and safe for the use of her grateful subjects, of both high and of low degree. How King Rufus managed his hunting—even afoot—it is hard to imagine. But for Her Majesty's care and expenditure the loyal citizen—for whom the Forest now exists, free for all, no matter whence he comes, or whether to gather flowers, to picnic, or to sport with hounds—would find it difficult to wander far into some of the more picturesque depths of the forest, but would have to pull up, again and again, for stream and swamp. Hundreds of bridges, often primitive but always effectual, have been built; many hundreds of bogs have been rendered passable by means of faggot and gravel; and the National Park of Old England is thus thrown open and made practicable for all who would wander through—on wheels in many directions, on foot as far as such method of exercise is likely to prompt, and on

horseback everywhere. Leaf and glade, flower and scenery, appeal to the tourist ; the wild animal, whose province and use is that he be hunted (and that money be spent and employment remain in our merry country) attracts the sportsman—and attracts him all the more because of its absolute wildness and the natural beauty of his home. No need of artificial preservation. The deer are hunted to be killed—for nominally they have no existence here : and the authorities shoot them down as closely as the wide extent of their haunts will permit. Foxes are hunted—well, because they like it—but in any case because their numbers must be kept down ; and, if to kill them, it requires many couple of dogs, and many men on horseback with whips and thongs and pocket-pistols and holsters, who shall blame the loyalty and self-abnegation that prompt the toil ? To check the increase of the devastating deer, and to extirpate the red fox—the universal robber, if one may believe a tithe of the tales that elsewhere are told against him—no less than three packs of hounds are needed—the expense of these by no means falling on Her Majesty, but borne entirely by her faithful and generous subjects, for very loyalty and the mere love of venery. One of these packs pursues the deer—and of this I hope to say more anon. The other two undertake the Sisyphus-like task of exterminating the fox. And for this purpose—a purpose it must be admitted almost as impossible of final attainment as the reclaiming of gypsies, or the extirpation of wild flowers and butterflies (at the hands and nets of great hordes of foreign invaders at certain seasons) they divide the Forest pretty equally between them—the River Lymington the boundary. The whole area of this great People's Park is, I take it, undergoing a gradual transformation—owing to the Deer Removal Act of 1851—when it was determined to do away with both red and fallow deer, to cut down as many of the old oaks as possible, and to thoroughly vandalise the ancient forest—as if the people had no right to a playground and it were better that all the world should be penned within brick walls. The axe was at length stayed by popular outcry ; and, whether as a result or coincidence I

am not at this moment sufficiently well posted to say, great tracks were fresh planted with oak and pine, and fences were run up (palisading and iron hooping) to protect the young trees from the forest ponies and the "extirpated" deer. Thus the heart of the Forest, especially within half a dozen miles of Lyndhurst, is chiefly taken up with these Inclosures; and most of this lower land has assumed a character more like the pine woods of Western America than the old English forest of beech and oak.

It was in this very woodland country that the New Forest hounds hunted on Tuesday, April 21; it was on upland moor and heather that Mr. Mills' foxhounds were mainly at work on Wednesday—the days on which it was my privilege to see them and to reap right good reward for my journey. To my mind such surroundings as those of forest scenery—unhindered by fear of harm to crop or damage to stock, and leading to no thought of fence-breaking or fence avoiding—are far more in keeping with spring hunting than anything we can obtain in the sufferance districts. The ordinary woodlands of a cultivated country answer the same purpose, *while you are within them*. But at any moment you may be out—when you in all probability find that there is no scent to hunt a fox, and that it is far too hard to ride after him if there were. With shelter within and heather without, you have a far better chance. There is likely to be moisture enough for both fox and horse, and hounds can generally run gaily.

For the last week there had been a *great* scent in the New Forest. On Monday the staghounds had run their fallow buck for more than an hour (the first twenty-five minutes racing pace) and killed him, without help throughout—while on both the following days the foxhounds went like wildfire. After the recent rain you could gallop along every ride—and there are so many of them that you need never be wide of hounds, while the undergrowth is seldom enough to hide them from view. Outside the said "Inclosures" you may usually gallop the track of hounds; and but for the fear of bog and morass that come across

your path about once to ten times that you imagine them there, you may ride right up to the pack. For such purpose you must have a handy horse—if possible a Forest horse (no pony, though). Or you may find a variety in being banged against a tree, swept off by overhanging boughs, or plunged into a holly bush. But he must be able to gallop, and be able to stay; he should be ready to change his legs in a moment, and when he plunges into a wet place he should do so with his forelegs advanced one before the other, like a fighter preparing to counter—not like a Leicestershire horse flinging himself shoulder deep into a second ditch.

Brockenhurst Bridge was the meet of the New Forest fox-hounds on Tuesday—the 8.5 train from Waterloo putting it within morning reach of the metropolis, whose bricks and mortar have been shed forward by the wayside marvellously during the past decade. Soon will the cold-meat train, of dissipated memory, carry the soldier to his morning parade along a continuous street to Aldershot. And soon even will the seclusion of the New Forest itself be tapped, unless the holiday-ground be kept rigidly guarded against enterprise. The quaint little town of Lyndhurst wears at this time her best apron: welcomes the coming guest with invitation to Apartments and Stabling, by placard on every unoccupied window; and is busy adding to and improving her existing accommodation. Lyndhurst, indeed, is aiming at becoming a woodland Melton. “She is fair. Beware”—lest her prices grow proportionate. At present she is modest and homely, comely withal.

Hounds had gone some little distance into the woods to seek their fox, ere I and my mentor reached them among some of the southernmost Inclosures of the country. We were in time, however, to hear the first halloo, to join the first rush, and to find ourselves splashing along a succession of wet rides, with a hundred other people as bent upon galloping as ourselves. There was a capital cry, as was fitting from a pack made up chiefly from the kennels of Milton, Atherstone and Mr. Harding Cox.

As I have said, the rides were so handy that you could almost twist and turn with hounds. Now and again you might venture to plunge in among the fir trees, and gain ground by following the pack—a risky experiment, however, for the inclosure-fences are not all to be jumped, though in the course of the day I did see Povey, the huntsman, clear an iron-railing unhesitatingly at

one place, and the Master, Mr. Stanley Pearce, take a most awkward and slippery stile at another. Briefly, there was a burning scent; and for twenty minutes we galloped hard—from the inclosure of Stockley, by Lady Cross to that of Frame Heath, then across the railway into that of Stubby, when their fox was completely blown by the pace. He turned back through Woodfidley, and recrossed the railway to be killed in Frame. (Have I got it right?) They ate him, too, without who-whoop or ceremony; and only a jawbone and an ear were recovered, to tie to the saddle. Second fox was a vixen, and was left. No. 3 also came out of New Park, near the place of meeting, a

park and lodge said to have been set apart by Charles I. for the due preservation of a herd of red deer sent him from abroad. But we, as a multitude, are not monarchical, nowadays, with regard to forests—let our individual and broader sympathies be what they may. Well, they gave Tertius a dressing for twenty very sharp minutes, after which he went to ground—no earths stopped after March, and very rightly. Quartus gave a more elaborate hunt. Gritnam Wood, I learn, was the name of his holding. He looked outside and they ran him; came back and they ran him better—over Lyndhurst Hill, and by Emery Down, past Northerwood House on to clean heather and common, to the Manor House (the seat of Mr. Compton, one of the mainstays of the Forest)—rhododendron bushes, fox headed from further inquiry into Lyndhurst precincts, some clever hunting to recover line, and reynard won the parti. An hour and a half of useful hunting—very rough riding—trees and broken country—stables and gruel close at hand.

On Wednesday Mr. Mills's foxhounds were at Ocknell Bridge—to reach which from Lyndhurst one followed for some distance a hogsback commanding a glorious view of all the northern forest. A sea of trees stretched far away to the right; rolling moorland, broken here and there by patches of dense inclosure, carried the eye forward and leftward as far as it would reach. A strong cool breeze drove across the hill—giving one the idea that in midwinter this must indeed be a bleak region. Already the roads were drying and dust occasionally flying; but scent was no less keen, and hounds ran as fast as yesterday. Albrighton and Belvoir blood, I learn, form the bulk of Mr. Mills's pack, and very sharp, active little hounds they are. They were first taken for a cruise over the open moor, Sears moving quietly through gorse and heather, while the two whips were thrown wide down wind as scouts. A fox not being forthcoming, the Inclosure of Holly Hatch was about to be entered; when, ere reaching it, we suddenly found ourselves embarked in a rush through trees and bushes—the horn twanging cheerily, hounds throwing their tongues noisily in the jungle ahead, and

our heads, hats, and eyes being beaten and battered to a confusing tune. Soon we issued on to a good grass ride—to find that two ladies and three or four men had already forced their way through the foliage, and were galloping in view of hounds whose tongues were our only link. Rides diverged and hounds shifted their course. Now one section of the party rode by sight, and now by hearing; then another took up the running among the open timber. Now

They came to where the brushwood ceased, and day
Peered twixt the stems; and the ground broke away
In a sloped sward down to a brawling brook.

It was an honest little streamlet, though, and boded no harm with bog or swamp; so the gallopers rode onward with the pack through holly shrub and gorse—darting round the bushes with all their energy, lest hounds should slip them and their start be lost. Now they were in covert again (in Broomy Inclosure) and through the clear woodland they went a tremendous pace—among the nearest to hounds being a young lady on a strong black horse, taking for her beacon, probably, one of Lyndhurst's quickest riders (Mr. Powell), also on a striding black (and who seemed to me at all times to leave as little unnecessary daylight as possible between himself and hounds running). Coming forth again, they were once more in the open; and with a much-increased attendance went into Milkham Inclosure, took a turn within it, and came back to Broomy. Hard as ever they ran till they reached the main earths—twenty-five minutes, as fast as hounds often go.

A second fox went to ground quickly. But a third, found in the open beyond Ashley Lodge, gave half an hour's good sport before he, too, went under the heather. The last ten minutes, after leaving Amberwood with No. 3, were across rough open ground—a merry scramble among bushes and bogs. No one was stuck; but horses pulled up pretty thoroughly blown.

So ended two days of bright wild foxhunting. On both days were hounds quickly and cleverly handled. What surprised me

more than all in the Forest is the facility with which one can get about, and how much more one can see of the work of hounds than I had been led to suppose. And if, during the excitement of the chase, a stranger is impelled towards danger or difficulty, the courtesy of the *habitués* is invariably exercised to stop him.

I must crave permission to complete my jottings with the addition of some few names. Among the field on the second day were, Lord Londesborough (who drove Major Candy to the meet on a prairie buckboard), Lord Raincliffe, Lady Raincliffe driving, Mr. Bradbourne (ex-Master of the New Forest Foxhounds), Captain and Miss Kinglake from Exmoor, Mr. and Mrs. Proctor-Baker from the Duke of Beaufort's country, also Mr. Harford from the same Hunt, Hon. R. C. and Mrs. Trollope from Somersetshire, Mr. Esdaile (present Master of the West Somersetshire) and Colonel Esdaile, Col. Powell and Mr. Powell, Mr. Wingrove (Hon. Sec. N.F.F.H.), Mr. Bathurst, Major Otway (who during the day experienced the alarming predicament of

being hung by his stirrup), Mrs. Austin, Messrs. Blake, Tabernacle, Anstiss, Dallas, and Dickson; and on the previous day Hon. G. Lascelles (Deputy Surveyor of the Forest), Mr. Waterhouse, Mr. Miles, &c.

HUNTING THE WILD FALLOW DEER.

Whan shaws been sheene, and shraddes full fayre,
Itt's merrie in the fayre forrest.

AND never is the greenwood merrier than when, in its first greenness, it resounds to the horn, flashes to the passing pack, and re-echoes to the cry.

'Tis of to-day, May Day, I write—after hunting, after a long journey by a dolesome train, after such slender supper as work may warrant. The “Octagon Chamber” of my club is my midnight refuge—where no one comes but to “play” a solemn chess, to peruse a love story or meditate on his own, to commune with fate, or court the solitude of the moment. Mine is the last-named happiness, and I buckle to it cheerfully and hurriedly—my theme the New Forest and its staghounds, vernal scenery and the hunting of the deer, at a time when wood and moor are beginning a new year and when most men are seeking some new existence—frock-coated or binocular-bound perhaps (it is hard to say how they divide themselves—for this is the period of plans and changes, of medical advice may be, or of pecuniary thought, of labours resumed—the countryman's Maytime, the idler's December as much as it is the city man's). Read *The Field* and other authorities—there is no business in life beyond the finding something to slay and how to slay it properly, as behoves an Englishman and sportsman. Read the Daily Parliamentary and Financial—all is strife and struggle. Give me a few horses, some few books at home or accessible, and a shilling in pocket for a gateway or for a sickly urchin, I would far rather watch the spring proclaiming itself in green leaf and young life than have it brought home only by bill of

fare, by change of garb, by the herding together of summer associate, or even by the wolfish yell of two-to-one-bar-one. "There be airs which the physicians advise their patients to move into, which commonly are plain champaigns, but grasing and not overgrown with heather; or else timber shades as in forests."—Where will you find such airs better than in the New Forest, when a cool breeze is blowing under a May Day sun, through clouds of tree blossom and over beds of bloom, and when active sport may be had amid a very revelry of nature's fresh beauty. I will tell what I saw, taking it for granted that you, too, know nothing of hunting the wild fallow deer—as I knew nothing this morning, and now only know enough to wonder at the science and skill that the sport needs.

For some twenty years I have heard of Mr. Lovell hunting the buck. Every year doubtless has added to his knowledge of the craft; and of late years his pack has been greatly improved. Now he delegates a huntsman of his own teaching (Allen) to do the bulk of the work.

The meet of the staghounds to-day was at Ocknell Pond; and thither about midday we sauntered under the sunshine—the air gradually cooling and freshening as we emerged from the blossom-decked orchards of Lyndhurst to mount the heather-clad ridges above. Hounds were already on the spot—with their green-liveried attendants on horseback and on foot—when the Master rode up with Mrs. Francis and Miss Lovell. A very sturdy workmanlike pack—Bramham all over, and noticeably so, afterwards, in their pushing and undaunted vigour upon a lukewarm scent. It seemed odd to a new comer that each hound should have his neck embraced by a leather collar—bringing to mind irresistibly the double-all-round throttle-kerchief with which young England loves to force his, or even her, eyes out of their sockets, lest anyone should fail to perceive that he, or she, is of sport, sporting. In this case there was of course some better reason—not, as in my ignorance, it first flashed across my inquiring thoughts, a compromise with the

Muzzling Order, which condemns all Lyndhurst dogs to go about with their unhappy heads in cages—but that, while the buck was being sought out and separated by the tufters, the body of the pack should be led in hand, at convenient distance—instead of being shut up in barn or stable as on Exmoor. Huntsman, whip, and attendants, accordingly, each carried a strap with steel catches.

At the meet, or with hounds soon afterwards, were, among others—Lord Londesborough, Lord Raincliffe, Miss Denison, Mr. Bradburne, Hon. G. Lascelles, Misses Meyrick, Miss Standish, Captain and Miss Kinglake, Hon. R. C. Trollope and Mrs. Trollope, Mr. and Mrs. Tabernacle, Col. Powell, Miss Gilchrist, Major Talbot, Miss Talbot, Messrs. Charteris, Harford, Lloyd, Marsh, Miles, Powell, &c.

News—they don't call it *Khubber* in the New Forest—was brought to Mr. Lovell from more than one direction as to eligible bucks. The report acted upon was that handed in by Mr. Bradburne, of Lyburn, on the northern border of the forest—whose keepers had this morning viewed three capable bucks. (I am ready humbly to admit and to deprecate my ignorance of the true buckhunting terms, trusting to be permitted on future occasion to render myself more familiar with the usage and diction of this good, wild sport.) Then the pack were put into couples—or rather bunches—while there were picked out Challenger, Perfume, Hermit, and Moonstone, four steady old stagers, the first three from Bramham and among them a Harpagon, the fourth a home-bred dog and a grandson of Bramham Monarch, to be taken as tufters and to certify the buck. To witness the tufting we (*i.e.* about half a dozen of the more interested and as many more of the novices) followed them and their huntsman under Mr. Bradburne's pilotage down a hillside wood, where the deer had been seen some four hours before. We had expected to witness a long unwinding of a cold tortuous trail, culminating in the sudden uprising of the buck from his lair. But these bucks had been content to remain leisurely feeding in

the cool shade—and here were they suddenly pointed out by our guide, not a hundred yards from the grass riding we followed! One was a noble fellow, his horns branching proudly

from either coronet, as he faced us in surprise rather than fear; the others two fine young bucks that, well, would have graced a larder though they had hardly yet grown to the dignity of fitness for the chase. ("Oh, for my saddle-Winchester!" was the sacrilegious prayer that jumped instantly and all inappropriately into my backwoodsman-brain. Oh for "fresh meat" for a week! I think I could have had them all three—though I might have spared that grand old buck for his dignity and his probable toughness.) The huntsman (his mind on venerie not on venison) fairly feasted on the big buck for a dumb half minute, then quietly sauntered towards them with his tufters. Round went the three sets of antlers; up went three white woolly tails (not brushes, I believe, gentle foresters?); and away through the pine-trees glanced the deer, with hounds at their very flanks. It may be merry to ride

in the green, green wood ; but it is not always as rapid and ready a process as in the open. Deer and hounds could give us any weight among the timber—or else we were too slow at the drop of the flag. In a quarter of a mile they were outside the Inclosure ; and as we hurried forth through a gateway, they were clean out of sight across the sunlit heather and holly. But the next ridge was fully manned by skirmishers, reserving themselves for the chase proper, and declining to waste their strength upon preliminary tufting. So there were halloa and signal to set the huntsman right ; and information manifold to set him wrong—or at all events thinking, and digesting. One man had seen three does, another had seen four : a third had seen two bucks and two does : but, oddly enough, no one seemed to have seen three bucks. However Allen galloped on, to news of sight and note of hound, and presently, the great buck bounced across his path—and, a minute later, the two couple were caught up and on leash, Moonstone dropping to word like a well-broken setter. But somehow the deer got together again, consultation and new action had to be resorted to, eventually tufting began again, and once more the big fallow buck was set going. Without detailing the process further, suffice it to tell that, at about 2.45, Allen had his buck fairly separated, and Mr. Lovell gave the word to lay on. A curious occurrence verified the huntsman's impression, and went to justify the signal. The deer, in jumping the iron-bound fence into an Inclosure, had knocked off both his antlers, and there they lay, that who would might witness, and as if he had stripped for the fray. Nor is the occurrence so singular as it may seem. Remember, this is the month of May, when every buck is shedding his horns ; and when he is often known to drop them during the fury of the chase. Sometimes he will be viewed into a wood a lordly buck, and be described on his exit as a fat doe. For without his antlered honours who shall tell him by a distant glance ? And so it was to-day. Hounds changed somewhere ; but no one knew exactly where ; and in the end they killed a doe.

They were laid on, then, outside King's Garn ; then hunting very slowly for a while through the wood, suddenly found themselves close upon their game—for it is too seldom the custom (is it not ? I ask as one, who for many years has occasionally seen the deer hunted by almost all the English staghound packs, but pretend to no continued or practised experience) for hunted deer to put at once as long a distance as possible between themselves and their pursuers. Now hounds buckled to their work, drove him through the woodland, and issued on to comparatively open forest. At a great pace they ran through Ocknell Inclosure ; then embarked on wild upland and heather—one couple having slipped their comrades for a while, and leading them far across the open and down by the water side. (After the fox it should have been the duty of any who could to stop that couple ; but what the etiquette may be with buck I aspire not to know—and far better, I should say, on such occasions is sin of omission than that of commission.) For half an hour of moor and woodland it was warm and cheery fun. Then we sank deeper and deeper into the great timbered basin that extends from Puckpits (itself a nice little covert on the map, but in wooded reality some 1,700 acres) to Lyndhurst, and I don't know how far beyond. Question not my ignorance as to how, or by what route or series of circles we attained Lyndhurst Hill. Enough for me to say that we were all the while in woodland, and most of the time galloping hard on smooth grass rides, the tinkle of a hound's voice in the distance our occasional guide, but more often our faith pinned blindly to the movements of some such pilot as Mr. Lascelles, to whom of course the mazes of the New Forest are as simple and familiar as a ship's machinery to its engineer. Just when one was growing dizzy and bewildered in the labyrinth, and when a thought of time and train (a sportsman's most hateful bugbears) had begun to intrude, the chase all at once took an unexpected and convenient turn. The deer appeared on the scene (buck or doe, we must wait for the kill to tell) ; soon afterwards the leading hounds also crossed the ride, with the

others hunting them up in near proximity. We had left Holmhill Inclosure, and now we were close to Lyndhurst Hill. The deer lay down in water, jumped up before hounds, was chased back into the woods *she* had left, and after one more turn was pulled down—a doe. They had run about three hours, and they had come some five or six miles—across the map. I maintain we thus spent our Mayday cheerily—aye, and profitably, for we were making the most of the fresh air of Heaven and the picturesque beauty of Nature. For the sport, and the studies it suggested, we have to thank Mr. Lovell, its generous and skilful exponent. I will add of to-day only that as the green foliage, that already is hiding all the brown treetops of a week ago, assumes its place, the Forest Inclosures become at once more difficult for hearing and for seeing, and even for getting through. You can hear less of hounds, see less of them, and can certainly take fewer liberties in plunging after them. But those great good rides are an ever-failing help—with a pilot's assistance.

Early in the present century the New Forest would seem to have been a great breeding ground for hounds—as it was, too, a resort for the *élite* of many hunts when a May fox was to be killed, and when the Prince of Wales would come to hold court at the King's House, Lyndhurst. Mr. Nichol, I fancy, was Master of the foxhounds in those days; and the blood of his Justice, largely adopted at Badminton, has been made famous throughout England. The pack was sold in 1828 for a thousand guineas. Justice is written of as a hound of immense bone, and was described by his owner as being “as big as a deer.” If there were good walks enough for one kennel in those days, there are not enough for three in the present: consequently the greater part of the yearly entry in each case is now made up of drafts. Even then, it is said—and I cannot help quoting the paragraph intact—“Mr. Nichol's hunting and houndbreeding, well as he understood them, were conducted on a very rough principle; and digging a whole afternoon, fifteen feet after a fox with his black and tan terriers, was the style of

thing he liked best. This, however, was of rare occurrence, as the foxes used to breed in the morasses among the alderstools, and lay curled up there till the hounds, who got as black as ink, drew right up to them, and then jumped down in view, without any head of earths to fly to." It is better now—fewer morasses, more earths, and no digging. The staghounds of the Forest in the present day are almost entirely of Bramham Moor origin, and take to their work with all the vigour and dash that marks that pack upon its more legitimate game. It is to Mr. G. Lascelles, Deputy Surveyor of the Forest, whose father Lord Harewood was long time Master of the Bramham Moor—that the predilection for, and attainment of, this good blood is mainly due.

Exceptionally favourable, no doubt, was the spring of '90, for hunting in the Forest. The cold winds of April kept it back, till the time came for copious rain to fall. The ground then softened; and the moistened earth, while exuding lavishly its own sweet perfumes, retained a scent for hounds—testifying plainly that flowers and fox-hunting are not so wholly inconsistent as we were brought up to believe.

I am told the Forest can get very hard in a dry spring. All the more thanks, then, for its recent mood, which allowed of our seeing sport under gay sunshine yet upon elastic carpeting. Hounds have been out for the last time; and the fallow buck and Reynard the fox are now to be left to their summer holiday. The Forest is now for the tripper, the botanist, the painter, and the turtle doves. Already the last-named have been seen hovering round secluded hamlets and meandering through the quiet glens in the neighbourhood of their temporary nests. They might almost succeed in passing for something else—but that their plumage is invariably so brand new and their mutual content so obvious and untempered. A very Garden of Eden is the Forest for them. "Ah! the lovely days

when on a warm bank crowned with flowers we sate and thought no harm," sings the most lovesome, and the most proper of our poets—though, if I remember the context right, even he for one brief moment nearly strayed in the intoxication of fancy and surrounding.

By no means the least attraction of the Forest lies in the fact that its animal life, or at any rate all its game life, is wholly wild and natural. The gorgeous cock pheasant that starts up from your feet or struts the rides before your horse is no coop-raised bird; and it goes without saying that the blackgame (for some reason or other not nearly so plentiful now as two decades ago) are as absolutely untamed as the woodcocks that wend their way thither in autumn. So fully indeed do the woodcock appreciate the liberty and scope of the forest that they, like the turtle doves, will occasionally even remain to nest. As example it is told that one recent spring a woodcock's nest with its quantum of eggs (however many that may be) was found at the very spot where a buck had just died before hounds.

But of Monday, May 4th, and the staghounds. (By the way, save me from entanglement of speech, and answer me this—Why do these staghounds hunt the buck, while her Gracious Majesty's Buckhounds hunt the stag?—for I learn that in forest parlance a stag is always a red deer, a buck a fallow deer.) It is possible to reach a Forest meet by morning train from the metropolis, though with existing railway-service such a journey is scarcely a pastime of itself. The Crown lands cover no great area; and, indeed, its wild animals of every kind must all listen to the horn at least once a week, for eight months of the year. From Lyndhurst or Brockenhurst you may ride to any point in little over the hour; while Stony Cross, a village centre of the higher ground, is, so to speak, but a stone's throw from Ocknell Pond, whereat on Monday was held the last meet of the season.

Morning had broken in a rainstorm; but midday was wrapped in sunshine, and wood and hill stood out freshened

and brightened by the cleansing showers. Quite a large field—for the New Forest, wherein, I am told, a dozen is a more usual winter number. And they were moving off along the heathered ridge as I reached the trysting point. Several carriages were following the cavalcade, with many a parasol to proclaim the spring, as denoted, too, by the cool straw-hat of more than one equestrian. The heath fairly splashed with recent rain; and the gay gorse-bushes sparkled and dripped. Under the light grey clouds your eye could roam for miles over the clear, sunlit landscape. It was a perfect day for a view, a good day for hearing, a goodly day to live, and in no way a bad day for hunting. The drawback to May, as instanced on the previous Thursday, lies in the fact that the buck are then shedding their horns; and it is thus most difficult for the huntsman to keep to his proper quarry.

The earlier stage of hunting the fallow buck, viz., rousing and separating him, is by no means the least fascinating. The first rush of the antlered beauties, the scurry with the tufters, the headlong dive through wood and covert in their wake, and the practised skill of Master and huntsman that enables them to keep touch of the tufters and to distinguish between the several deer afoot—all this is matter of interest and excitement. Though the tufting is here not enacted on such rugged ground as with the red deer on Exmoor, one ought to have two horses out, to compass the double work with tolerable ease. Thus many people remain with the pack; but—speaking as one new to the game, yet appreciative of all I saw—it seemed to me that the preliminary gallop with those three or four old hounds is as jolly as any part of the chase.

Thus tufting itself is by no means without its charm; though it has the disadvantage of putting extra strain on the stable resources of all who would take any part in it. For instance, you can hardly gallop about for an hour or two with the tufters, and then expect the same horse to be at his best and freshest when the pack are laid on. Indeed, as a young gentleman explained it to me in his own vernacular, "If you want to play

the Duke you must have two horses out. If you can't run to that, you had better sit tight till the tufting's done." Personally, I prefer to modify his excellent principles by seeing some little of the tufting-work and the find, while keeping in mind that the main trial is yet to come. However, this by the way. I am not as yet sufficiently advanced to act the part of school-master.

The prolonged trailing up to deer that have moved, often forms another part, full of interest and beauty, of their morning task.

To-day the deer had been closely and recently harboured. So, after a two-mile saunter along the hill top, we were taken to a wood, within a certain quarter of which they were known to be still grazing or reposing. Open heather and hillside was on our right; and out over this they came bouncing forth—four lusty buck, the leader and biggest carrying but a single horn, the other three, full antlered but comparatively young, bounding after him in single file. One of the tufters—old Moonstone, who would seem to have a special talent for this portion of the work, being a close line hunter, full of tongue yet free of action—was at their heels: the other couple, of the same two that figured on the last occasion, followed forth to the cheer, and were soon straining over the heather in pursuit of the flying deer. The latter paused half-way up the slope for one more look; then flew forward again, and we had a rough, cheery gallop of some sixteen or seventeen minutes, pulling up on a sudden at the ironbound fence of Puckpits—and below us to all appearance the whole world wood. The sound of hounds had faded out; and to a stranger it looked as though Hercules himself could not have handled such a task as clearing those huge woodlands, and therein deciphering the course of hounds and the choice of deer. When, previous to 1851, Mr. Lovell first inaugurated the chase of the fallow deer, there were none of these great pine inclosures. How glorious must have been the Forest then! Now, to the ignorant stranger, it is nothing less than a marvel that these great woodlands can be tackled at

all—that the tufters do not often get away for the day, or the whole pack for the night.

What may have happened to the four deer and the three hounds for the next few minutes I cannot say—though I am inclined to think that the whole of both parties were all the time within a few hundred yards—while most of us rode aimlessly about, and the huntsman bided his while. For all at once the brake seemed alive with buck and with hounds. A white-gravelled forest road skirted the covert side; and across it in opposite directions came a single buck either way, then from different directions the tufters—to be stopped, while consultation was held.

Soon it was determined to follow with the tufters the buck that had broken back for the more open country towards Slufers; to force him, if possible, well away from the heavy mass of Inclosures into which the others had dived. (At least I presume this was the object.) Accordingly the trio of old hounds were laid on, and their voices were soon going among heather and holly (the latter, be it explained, the chief undergrowth and shrub of the forest). On reaching Slufers (how curious a nomenclature belongs to these woods!), not only a buck, but several does were before them. A grand old fox showed himself, too; and gazed with wonder—maybe with scorn, according to his light—on the curious function. But he, of course, passed unnoticed by hounds or spectators—though he fairly winked in the face of Povey and the whips of the New Forest Foxhounds; and the latter gentleman had to fall back for revenge upon tuning up to a deer crossing the main ride. A hunt servant as a looker-on is always a pleasing sight. He is a very boy on a holiday. No one so keen, no one so appreciative. The only parallel I know is a playactor scrutinising a first night from the stalls.

The value and whereabouts of the deer was now the conundrum which the tufters were given the task of elucidating. One hound was shortly stopped on a doe. The other couple then gave sharp chase to something unknown, but seen from a

distance to break in a fitting direction. Some yeomen foresters dismounted, pipe in mouth, to deliberate aloud, and in west country tongue, upon the sandgraven slot—giving it as their opinion that 'twas a small pricket or else a doe. But this testimony did not appear in evidence. The afternoon was waning, and orders were given that the pack should be laid on. This upon the road twixt Ringwood and Romsey—near the sixth milestone, if I remember right, from the former place. Whatever the deer was, it had not gone more than a few minutes; so there was every chance of a scent and likelihood of a run. Quietly they were unbuckled, and quietly carried to the line. They wanted no telling of what was in prospect, but at once dashed at their work with the eagerness of highbred foxhounds and the readiness of taught staghounds—a pack, too, be it remembered, that is accustomed to taste blood almost every time it goes out.

Swinging into the trail at their second fling, they caught the direction in a moment, and were away at high speed over the smooth moorland, till they struck the timber at Slufers, and threw their tongues heartily under the trees. Their deer had waited for them; and pace and chorus grew hot as they dashed after him or her, unantlered; while we rode and zigzagged our best through the hollow pine-wood. Out over a boundary bank and ditch, down into the little valley and across the streamlet, up the yonder slope in deadly fear of rumoured bog. They who know the country may afford to ride for point; a stranger's only chance is to keep hounds in view as long as he can—or surrender all individuality of action from first to last. Providence, too, generally grants immunity to the ignorant—and is forbearing to those who trust her. Have we not seen it in many a hunting field and on many an occasion besides? Ah! Here it is: now we are in it: too late to go back, yet evident peril ahead! Flounder and struggle—prayer and imprecation. Hold up, old fellow; we are safely out. Lucky you know how 'tis to be done. A Leicestershire horse might have been lying there now. The yellow moss wasn't visible

two strides away. (Those are trying moments when the heather seems to vanish before your gallop, when you look in vain for tuft and hassock, and when nothing remains but to hold your breath—and the head of your struggling beast as he



plunges into the green, dank morass. How grateful you feel to him and to the directing cherub, who watches over the cross-country rider and his fortunes quite as staunchly as over seafaring Jack, when a last heave and a final gasp land you once more upon heather firma!) In a few minutes we were in Bolderwood, one of the highest and most picturesque of the Inclosures, and a favourite point of excursion from Lyndhurst and other tourist-centres. At the present moment a coach had just driven up, and deposited its load for their picnic. Hounds and deer were soon again in sight as we galloped on; and our progress was now among the dark rides of the woodland. To shorten my story, it will be enough to tell that our deer, a young pricket, broke his foreleg as he jumped the high railings to turn back towards the open; and that a few minutes later hounds pulled him down within the covert.

GRASS COUNTRIES.

SEASON 1889—1890.

A MEMORABLE WINTER.



A FLUTTER FROM ALFORD THORNS.

THE Pytchley once again in full flower. Saturday with this pack at Clipston, has left in my brain one of those quick-fleeting memories that I love to rehearse upon paper, that belong to the Shires, and of which my regular readers (if I possess any such) must have had more than their fill during the years in which I have thus caught at incident in its course, and thrown it by handfuls in their long-suffering faces. You are a fox-hunter—and thus indulgent, you know; and you love to feel the stir of the chase, the vigour of a ride to hounds. And here is such to be found—I mean not in one Hunt, but wherever good grass and honest fences form the basis upon which fox and hounds are called upon to work and men are invited to ride. I'll cut off the beginning of my little tale of to-day, and set you going half a mile from Alford Thorns, with a bad start, a flying scent, and hounds almost out of sight. The showers of a troubled night have left the grass wet and slippery, for another still, misty day; and steep, sloping turf, gives you a greasy welcome as you dash into a gully, and take the handgate gratefully from an old friend *—whose absence from the last month's gallops has been as the loss of an eye to the prow of a junk (simile more fitting than elegant). “Fresh as a bridegroom is he; and you feel more at home as you mark his shoulders go

* Mr. Gordon Cunard.

up, and grasp of his whip shorten six inches towards the thong. 'Tis business now. John has just turned from a five-foot rail—not because he found any fault with it, but because the young one declined to cope. But he has a gate swung, and you are greatly obliged to the young one. Fifty acres and another gate: fifty acres more towards Waterloo Gorse, and yet another gate—also Mr. John Bennett, on one of the thoroughbreds, not big enough for Newmarket or Doncaster; and the pack are glinting in front, speeding faster than horseflesh. Rightward they swing from a band of footpeople, and one's head almost whirls with the pace and the curl while we scratch through a bullfinch, mutter hard and earnest oaths at some demon unknown who all but caught us in his infamous wire; then cruise down the hedge for a loophole, and ride away hotly with a tail hound as guide. A double, they tell me, that reaches a mile, and jumpable only in one special spot—but this is a spot that a fox always chooses—and safely and readily it is left behind by some six sets of hoofs, and I know not how many more, while a gallery of footpeople (heaven can tell whence) yell delightedly as each horse rises and lands. There is a road from Clipstone running westward; and here hounds “chucked it” for a few brief seconds, while Mr. Baring and Captain Middleton sat still to breathe. The pack swung to it just as Goodall galloped up; and the burst went on to Marston Hills, dipping downwards in slower measure to the vale beneath. The coverts were left on the right, and the first quarter of an hour held the cream. But it was some forty minutes in all before their fox was hunted into the grounds of Marston Trussells, and into a rabbit-hole.

GRIEF WITH THE GRAFTON.

THE Grafton deferred their opening day—as far as uniform and their best country are concerned—beyond November's first Monday.

In mufti and merriment, though, we commenced the month;

and the first Friday of November with these hounds was cheery in the extreme. The turf is now like a fresh-dipped sponge ; scent hangs richly upon it, and hounds revelled on the green ; wet ground is now a certainty, scent a probability for the opening season. Already the middle ride of Plumpton Wood was found with power to put the brake on, as we struggled up its miry length to reach hounds and holloa at the top. We have had many superb hunting days of late, and into such an one had Friday developed, after dashing storm after storm upon our window-panes, and bidding the cowardly come forth if they dare. The rain swept by, the heavens opened ; we were glad to cast waterproofs to second horsemen, or into a wayside cottage, and the landscape displayed itself so sharp and clear you might have viewed a fox a mile away. There were newcomers of high degree, a field that was bent upon seeing sport, and there was the Grafton ladypack to show it them. High spirits and sound legs prevail in November. The five months' future has a merry look. Who cares to foresee its drawbacks, its difficulties, or its disappointments ? Get away ; hark, hark ! The ladies are gone

“ Where music dwells,
Lingering and wandering on as loth to die ; ”

the horn is ringing its sharpest command ; and there's no room on my crupper for you, dull care.

Thus at Plumpton Wood, where were faces new to the Grafton this autumn, to wit—Mr. Walter and Lady Doreen Long, Mr. and Mrs. Griffith, Messrs. H. Bourke, H. Bull, G. Campbell, Grazebrooke, Macdonnald, &c. It was too early in the day for sandwiches ; it ought to have been too early in the season for coffee-housing, and yet more people were left in the wood than went out with hounds. All sorts of things they thus missed. They missed the chance of following a soldiers' lead into a brook, or of bringing on to him his billycock of brown, for which he himself waited not to fish (no such reckless extravagance next week, young sir ; the cheapest silk hat costs a guinea). They missed the opportu-

nity of rolling into the brook field with a second horseman, and, like him, rolling out again over the water. And they exchanged five minutes of fun for as many of clattering agony, while they beat the road's unsympathising surface in their mad gallop to reach the front. This they achieved at Grumbler's Holt, once more returned, and set forth again from Plumpton wood; so to the well-fenced neighbourhood of Blakesley village. Oh! for a stable-Aladdin, and new legs for old! And, "oh! how full of briars is this work-a-day world," and its ditches! The Blakesley brook, too, a gentle stream, no doubt, and a tiny rivulet here and there. Then why should it ask for a 20-foot bed, and for the shelter of a dark stake-and-bound as it flows under the village? Only, I ween, that it may bring men to shame and horses to grief. I am told that the huntman himself has here been caught more than once, and that one of our hardest and straightest has only once got to the other bank after counting four failures. Let these former incidents pass, the first essayist of to-day met the usual fate; but fished his horse out so quietly that the next, contented to accept the lead with such confidence as is inspired by good example, merely drove his spurs home to make assurance doubly sure. He said afterwards he dreamed little or nothing of water, till the grey mare took off a length and a half from the fence, and the chasm gradually loomed out as they went into upper air. Her best effort brought her barely to the further bank. For a moment she was poised upright on her head, the girths flashed amid a blaze of white and sparkle of iron, and the next second she completed the somersault. Now, I regret to say on the best authority, she is poised on three legs for awhile. Well, it might have been worse over wire. This, too, had to be submitted to a while later on—not at the same hands or heels, it is true. But the caution came home, the lesson was read and bitterly digested—though no great harm resulted now. It was in a very sharp scurry from Tite's Copse, amid what was long held to be the prettiest patch of the Grafton country—till, first, an evil spirit suggested a railway

being thrown across it, and, later still, this barbed invention of the same personage came into vogue, on one side to promote malice, on the other to pander to carelessness. The pack on this occasion made a flying circle over the grass, nearly by Bradden, then with a swing across the valley towards Seawell Wood, back by Blakesley village to Tite's Copse, which they reached in sixteen minutes, having run right away from their field throughout. Gates, and gates only, fell to the share of their galloping followers, till, with a bright sun in their eyes, they approached some easy uphill fences on the way back. The wire rang out like a banjo as three horses rose at a hedge together. Mr. Campbell and his black horse were flung into the next field, while two other couples kept their legs with a struggle. The wire was so hidden by sun and thorn that others who came next would scarcely accept the warning of shout and clamour, and almost rode open-eyed to their fate. Yet the farmer meant them no harm. "A capital fellow" they say he is; and only wanting his memory jogged. Such instances await us on all sides. Too many good fellows are asleep; and the awakening may come with a terrible casualty at their doors. Now, in the next five minutes hounds had raced two foxes to ground—the pack dividing, and both sections chasing in view. So the day ended.

THE WHITE TROUT.

SUDDENLY the snow faded away and the season re-opened on Monday with a southerly wind and a cloudy sky—and with a glad warmth that sent one to covert in a glow of content, surprise, and anticipation. Frost and idleness had lasted long enough to make the outlook oppressive, the present tedious, and the future gloomy. "Quiet to quick bosoms is a hell;" and a sluggish existence, so sudden and so early, was almost unbearable.

But of Monday—a different tale. The Grafton enlivened

the reawakening to a fitting tune. They had met at Maidford; and, after minor episode, had set a ringing fox to ground with an hour's work—while men and women freely bestrewed the half-thawed earth, and half-a-day satisfied half the field. Then ensued an hour's real gallop, the better of which they will scarcely see this year. They found their fox in Tite's Copse—the staunch little planting by Blakesley—and towards the latter village he broke as the only way open to make his way over the pastures to Bradden—scent and pace all that could be wished; fences few and gates many. An angel in disguise of corduroy and smock drove him back from the too customary earths by the hamlet; and hounds' heads were now to the south-west, whence last night's charm had brought the wind. So they improved occasion and even pace, till some hock-deep arable held them lingering a moment, then leaving Tite's Copse just on the right, they entered upon a sharp succession of wild grassfields through which their fox might have bestridden a galloping hack, so amiably did the gates come, while the pack tore on for Weedon Bushes. Beneath this lies a brook, lightly fenced, snow-swollen now, and not badly bridged. But there is one among us to whose thirsty soul such cool waters are as “glad tidings from a distant land.” So he dipped in, but rose refreshed, to reappear at next occasion of a hungry flood. We, meanwhile, had risen the brow—Apthorpe's village spire now prominent on our left—crossed another road, and had gone westward still, more rapidly than even emigration's flow. A miniature field had remained, or the little gates had been choked. Hitherto it had been nearly all galloping and gate-shoving—proficiency in which double duty (no mean capability either) has been said to be as of the arm and whip, rather than as of the heart and spur. This matters not. It was a gay gallop; and had the devil been offered the hindmost, he could scarcely have poached on the foremost.

Thus up the valley, past Weedon Bushes and 'twixt Weston and Wappenham, where we struck a brook at its angle. Some three men went straight on, to accept the swollen difficulty as

it came—while hounds (and others) bent rightward, and the brook came again. Very yellow, very rapid—ordinarily very small, to-day very assertive—was the swift running streamlet ; while horses had forty minutes and a fortnight's frost now telling upon them. Mr. G. Barrett—already penalised seven pounds with a cropper over some strong timber near Bradden village—didn't hesitate. Others did—while he gallantly worked out the contrast between hard ash rails and soft snow-water. Never mind ; he landed—and the rest looked for something better. They hoped for it, it seems, from knowledge of a narrow channel through which the water was wont to run only six feet wide. But the water was all abroad to-day. Mr. Fuller found the place but couldn't find the bottom : so his plucky example only served as a warning to the others. From the rear now rode the resurrectionist * (I know him well enough to anticipate his pardon) and by way of annulling the ill effects of one ducking bade his good horse face the chances of another. Again he took a fall, though not a ducking this time—and yet no key was found. So far from personal observation. Now for the hateful pronoun *I*. But *I* comes in handy, when somebody has to instance misadventure. When I make a fool of myself (no uncommon occurrence, I grant) I can deal with *I* as I choose. Well, I was averse to remaining there. Wistfully I glanced for the huntsman's directing form, but he too was for the moment nonplussed on the bank. So, with a fat mare and a fainting heart, I took the plunge—for hounds were already a furlong away, fairly laughing at us with their merry cackle. I hated to get in ; but I should have hated myself far worse had I turned away. Or, to put it otherwise, I hadn't the pluck to funk though I would. You shall hear it out—for it is from fool's mishaps that men become wise.

The steeper bank was on the side of the hounds : the mare could not climb it ; and all hope of progress was dashed to the waters. The little band of horsemen—intent on their own

* Mr. C. Adamthwaite.

escape—had hurried on up stream in search of a bridge (which, by the same token, they found only a field further on!)—and I, like “the last rose of summer,” was “left blooming alone.” One young gentleman, to do him justice, came back, and had a flick at the mare with his lash. But, finding this of no avail, he gladly availed himself of the invitation to go on. A rustic stood on the farther bank—but the mare of course had to be got back whence she came. “Capital—so glad of your help! Get over quick, and here’s half-a-crown.” The rustic forthwith ran up and down the bank like a terrier seeking for water-rats; and the mare meanwhile subsided like a dead log, as blown horses in water always will. “Get over, you fool! She’s drowning!”—and with a one-legged hop I placed myself on the shore whereon I meant to beach her. But Rusticus stayed where he was; and neither entreaty nor plain speaking would make him venture the water. He merely scratched his head, and shook it, murmuring “I’d be watchered (Anglicè, wetted), I ca’ant joomp that fur.” From entreaty I went to objurgation; and, as the mare played dolphin in the deep water—hemmed in, too, by bushes growing on either bank—I grew angry, and sinned. In a state of fury almost excusable, I emptied my vocabulary (no slender one, but enriched from travel in many countries) at his cowardly head—till horrified and terror-struck he slunk off and disappeared. Now came another phase of the situation. The afternoon was fast closing in; and all around was solitude and silence, save for the chirping of the busy pack as—not half a mile away—they hunted backwards and forwards on a tired and dodging fox. Slipping one stirrup leather round her neck, and lengthening my hold with the other, I hauled the mare’s languid head on to *terra firma*; and then proceeded to review the position. The watch told me it was now close upon 4 p.m.—the date being near the shortest of days—and it was forty-five minutes since we had left Tite’s Copse. Not a living soul within sight; the evening still and dark and warm; good day for a wetting, anyhow. Let me see, how much did she cost me? Halloa, there’s a man cutting a hedge only three hundred

yards away. Hey, you! Now for a view holloa. He's sure to hear: or, who knows, perhaps it may fetch hounds back for news of their fox! Tally ho! Yoi!! Yoi!!! Help, you fool. Why the fellow's deaf! Of *course* he was deaf—did you ever know a man mending a hedge or a road who wasn't? He never moved, nor even looked up from his work! In sheer despair I soused the mare's head under water; and implored her by all her ancestry and by the soul of St. Patrick to make an effort. She made one, or two—then subsided lower than ever; and I played her by the bridle as if she were a great white trout. Again I lifted up my voice, and holloaed—I think I should have wept, had not I been so angered with Rusticus and his base cowardice. I holloaed to the rising moon, I holloaed to the dim grey horizon, and I bawled to the unknown distance. And the latter at length gave succour. A

whole village-full of wreckers suddenly dashed into view, bringing at least willing hands and sturdy hearts. Six men on to the stirrup-leathers; a crack with the whip, a pull all together—and the mare was on her legs on the turf, her back

up and every fibre quivering ; but alive. A quart of hot ale and a handful of ginger quickly brought back the circulation : and so ends my tale of woe. Their fox escaped to ground. Time, just an hour. Some people prominent in the run were Lord Alfred Fitzroy, Mrs. Simpson, Messrs. Adamthwaite, G. Barrett, Byass, Cazenove, Craven, Grazebrook, Jarvis, Onslow, Sandham, Thursby, Vaughan-Williams, Captains Faber and Orr Ewing.

THE BLACK FOX OF BERRYDALE.

I AM often asked, is it not a trouble and an effort to write of sport that is past ? Is it not like paying a tailor's bill when the clothes are worn out ? No, and for every reason. 'Tis a positive, eager luxury thus to go over events—delightful events—recently happened. I pay for the clothes while they are new and fresh. Take to-day, Friday, December 13. Do you suppose I would sink it in my dinner, or throw it aside with the boots that are soiled, or send it to the wash as draggled linen, to come up as the washerwoman of chance and of fate may permit ? Far from it ; let me bore others as long as they will stand it ; as long as the tree will bear fruit ; as long as the fruit in these precarious times is permitted to grow and to ripen. What would life be without uncertainty ? Unbearable. Were there no dismal times how could happiness (its contrast state) ever supervene ? Why, yesterday nine out of ten of us were down with the influenza of frost, and all prospect of hunting seemed limited to the chase of the microbe. See what there has been to-day, and how we come out of it—swearing by fox-hunting and averring that life is after all a bright and lovable thing ! A sufficient dinner, a light cigar, and—let me whisper it as one who might be greybearded but for the razor—barley water for an after quench : tell me there is no fun in going over a run a second time ? My dear fellow, a time will come when you or I would give a month's income for even such an after taste.

Frost had gone, and the Pytchley had come to Maidwell. Twenty minutes were given to our hosts. Then for Berrydale and a black-red fox afoot soon after half-past eleven. The thaw astonished Northamptonshire. London had heard nothing of it. So a score of riders made the meet, and three score the day's field.

But let us get on, over the green brow whereon the sheep had already bunched up together ere the black fox passed. Straggling out, men and hounds, from the hillside copse. Do you notice that the dog hounds—of each and every pack, I mean—never tumble out so blithely, or drive into it so viciously at starting, as do the sharper sex. In my ignorance I murmured for a mile or two, "There is only a quarter of a scent," while we rode the Cottesbrooke estate. But dog hounds, once together and once in fling, can kill a fox *on a fair scenting day* with more certainty than the little ladies, so say the huntsmen, and so am I, an outsider, bound to concur. Within Cottesbrooke's green sweeping basin, we are prone to think ourselves swimming within a circle—working within a mystic ring as it were—just as one's eyesight can be spun round by Pears' magical red radiant in the puzzle which, with so many other devices, goes to advertise his soap. Well, men forgot the basin and its environs to-day, and they rode the well-fenced arc rather than the gates. Scent warmed, the pack were well in front, and the black fox within distance. Before Purser's Hill he was to be seen streaking across the valley, while hounds drove on his line, and we trotted across to regain first wind. Over the next hill-top and "into the country" northward, John and Mr. Jameson demonstrating the said country to be more easy than it looked. "How did it ride to Hazlebeech?" "Excellently, my lord" (eighteen minutes). And more excellently still Hazlebeech, in a half circle to Scotland Wood (thirty minutes). And yet by the way he touched the fowlhouses of Hazlebeech one might have thought he was a dying fox. He was only seeking the evergreen squire. Finding him not, he displayed the next valley to such substitutes as he could find to wit, those above-named,

with, among others, Mr. Gordon-Cunard, on a novice (but a priest's novice, from Ireland), Messrs. Pender (on the old hog-maned brown from Lord Lonsdale's ante-polaric stud), Harford (on a chestnut four-year-old with a few snaffles in his mouth), De Trafford, Sheriffe, Harford, F. Langham, Captain Atherton, Miss Hanbury, Miss Czarnikov (with apologies for unwittingly forgetting to give *place aux dames*). This part of the gallop was across a charming—not a trifling, but quite a possible, quite a shire country. It would have been big with a lesser scent. Thus thirty minutes took us to Scotland Wood. A blown fox could not stay a moment, but hounds came right through with his line by the main ride, while we clustered rather too close to them, and a holloa was going shrilly in the field across the road. Half a dozen cold fallows served to cool matters down for a few minutes, but the pack kept holding the line in spite of other holloas on their right till Goodall took them in hand and made his fox good beyond the wooded dell of Maidwell Dale.

Forty-seven minutes, and e'en better, believe me, than '47 port. Goodall had a death-grip on the black fox now, for all the steel was out of him, and his last struggles were to be on good scenting grass. The doomed one gained nothing by touching Berrydale, except to complete his circle. Hounds dashed through it into the green basin again, and drove him towards Brixworth. A wide second ditch turned loose two of the best horses, and set afoot two of the best men of the Pytchley Hunt. But the little bay mare* looks for such a catastrophe about twice a season, and accepts it ungrudgingly on each occasion as accident unavoidable—the necessary lot of one who is called to tempt Providence so many times a day. And “more power to your bright eyes, lady fair! Sure it was Irish taching that brought you over the double-lep as it should be done.” Three more great grass fields, and we were by Cottesbrooke Hall. The pack went clamouring and scrambling over the wall by the rectory, shouting aloud, as it were, for the prince of foxhunting

* Mr. Jameson's.

churchmen. But echo only answered Where, and the field, now gathered and reformed (the last word in a military not in a penitentiary sense), went on together to the next parish, that of Creaton. Here our fox was crawling into a garden, and whose should that garden be but that of the talented author of the *Pytchley Cookery Book*! Sixteen couple of hungry guests rushed in, and then and there was served up a dish dainty enough to set before a king—a ragout of the black fox of Berrydale. An hour and twenty minutes it had taken in the cooking. Now we wiped our foreheads, and said a hearty grace.

A REMARKABLE WEEK.

Dec. 19th, 1889.—Read as little of the following as you choose, as much as you will. It has been my fortunate lot to see sport in the last four days that might fairly suffice a month, and that alone might make a season memorable. The Grafton, the North Warwickshire, the Pytchley, and the Warwickshire have made their mark in turn, for our grateful benefit, as you may see crudely sketched below.

Sport every Monday is the present happy lot of the Grafton, and consequently of all who have the luck to hunt with them on their Weedon side. Monday, Dec. 16, was marked by a fifty-five minutes' gallop over the best of their ground; as I will sketch briefly to-night in its turn, before three other packs and their doings in succession shall have clouded my chronicle. A warm morning, and a great good field, first witnessed the killing of a brace of foxes on the Fawsley estate—over which we galloped to full content of ourselves and first horses. To complete the day, the glorious lady pack (there is no exaggeration in the epithet) was taken on to Knightley Wood—and were drawn out at 3.15. Home, of course! Mantel's Heath cut down, and nothing nearer than Canon's Ashby to draw. The five minutes' deliberation was broken in upon by the best of interruptions. Hark, holloa! Hark holloa!! An old fox

had stolen away at the bottom ; but had reckoned without his host, the second whip. There had been a passable—no, a galloping—scent all day. In the cool of the evening hounds had a hold on their fox wherever he went, and wherever he turned. And this fox was a good and bold one. I fancy to-day's run was better even than the previous Monday's. I will make my sketch mainly for local reading ; and local men shall judge. Hounds settled admirably—free and unshackled along the grass valley beneath Mantel's Heath. Indeed, throughout, this gallant fox held his way over chosen ground—taking the middle of the grass fields, and at length shaking off his tormentors by beating horses rather than hounds. In the fast early mile or two, who was more prominent at the tail of the pack, tell me, than that tiny girl on the tiny grey pony ? “ Can't steer him ; I must go,” she explained happily, as she spun over the fences and twisted through the gates. A more astonishing performance I never witnessed. This was while the pack flew the valley between the villages of Farthingstone and Litchborough. Then they turned uphill for Maidford Wood—and the field squeezed its way through an orchard which was also a great black refuse-bog. No chaff on this occasion, please, gentlemen. Some mischances are too serious, and too exhausting, for laughter. Ah, what a boon is good-fellowship and unselfishness ! He is a true Christian who helps another from the Slough of Despond.

Maidford Wood was tempting, one would have thought ; but our stout fox, like Gallio, cared for none of these things. He shied away from it, to keep on the turf, and to leave Maidford Village just on his left. The Maidford Brook was forded—one at a time, which is a painful dilatory process, except for the first man. Running on—a capital pace, but no positive race—hounds passed to the right of Adstone Village, and went on to the railway about half-way between Plumpton Wood and Canons Ashby, when they suddenly divided, and it was a matter of luck whether you were caught tripping to the fresh line or held forward with the acknowledged chase. In either

case you had time to join in after Plumpton Wood, and to put in appearance at the check beyond Grumbler's Holt, there to join a steaming and dismounted group. I fear that Mr. Stevens's smart little grey jumped his last fence about this period—for they tell of a broken back at a wide yonder ditch. To the check was fifty minutes by the watch, and over six miles by the ruler on the map (extreme points). For five minutes more they ran hard. But at Western Spinney a brace of foxes were just before them; horses were nearly at a standstill, and night was drawing in apace. So Beers decided to give in to his fox, though holloas were going loudly in the village of Weedon Lois close by. A splendid run, with never a check—altogether over deep wet grass—and completing, as an unexpected windfall, a fine day's sport. Some thirty people saw the run—among them Lord Alfred Fitzroy, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas-Pennant, Mrs. Byass, Lord Capell, Baron M. de Tuyll, Major Riddell, Messrs. Campbell, Fuller, Thursby, Jarvis, Adamthwaite, Church, Vaughan, Rhodes, St. Ives, Jenner, Shepperd, Weatherby, Geddes. By the way, may I—as one no longer subject to the majesty of military law—venture to query, Are not the powers-that-be keeping the soldiers unusually tight? Of the Standing Orders of 1889 I know nothing. But I do remember to have heard what the Iron Duke said, and what the Royal Duke of the present day holds, about fox-hunting and its advantages. I know full well also that the Weedon training seldom falls to man's lot twice in a lifetime.

Now for "the timely dew of sleep." But I can't help wishing we had seen that fox brushed. I fear we changed by Plumpton Wood.

On Tuesday, Dec. 17, the North Warwickshire were at Clifton, by Rugby; and sport continued. The thermometer stood at about 50°, and scent was warm as ever. An immense field appeared to include representatives from nearly every Hunt in the kingdom. Suffice it to mention as pleasant instances Lord Ribblesdale and Count Zborowski, the latter

bent on drawing his own comparisons between Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. Then, Clifton being almost at the junction point of three counties and three adjoining Hunts, the Master may be said to-day to have been catering for at least half the natives of the Midlands. (The parallel of Barnum holding his three great shows in one arena naturally suggests itself, but would be less graceful than *apropos*.)

The afternoon saw quite a bright gallop from Cook's Gorse, and bore out what has just been said about scent—for hounds could turn with a fox that twisted, and then force him afield whether he liked it or not. From Cook's Gorse they spun sharply over the fields, at first towards Willoughby, then after crossing the brook (which we bridged) swept leftward toward Hilmorton, till they rose Barby Hill. Excellent fences, and just pace enough for testing or teaching a young one—all



except that jump on to a canal towing-path, which had too much of the Mayne-Reid and Indian horsemanship flavour to be altogether welcome to the timid fox-hunter. They made Braunston Cleaves in some thirty-five minutes; and there

their fox probably got to ground. A pretty gallop, men said—and so say I. Surprisingly well the turf rides now; and so will it, I hope, continue.

Wednesday, Dec. 18.—Fifty of us are happy to-night over the Pytchley gallop from Swinford Old Covert. Lord Braye found us a gay fox and a gallant arena; and we one and all (I can answer gratefully for one) cracked a bottle in his honour to-night as blithely as we cracked his good ash rails this afternoon. Forty-five minutes hard running, and a kill—a run that most of us could see, and all who saw will treasure, as forming part of an extraordinary week (we are only half through it yet, and have scarcely begun to count casualties). I must be brief, though I would fain be lengthy, and would for my own sake love to spell it out again field by field. Swinford Old Covert is a little thicket, having river and railway to southward. Fox and hounds went for the water and the iron road, and carried a following after them—till the water, this being the young Avon. We meanwhile—i.e. the less courageous and such as pride ourselves on knowledge of country (often the most dangerous and littlest of knowledge)—went for the hard road and the station crossing. The hound followers were for the moment cornered—all but one, a stranger whose name no one ever learned, and who retired ere the lists were ended and the laurel wreath was ready for presentation. Like the black knight of Ivanhoe, this darkly clad horseman won his triumphs and cared not to claim acknowledgment from the proven adversaries he had fairly vanquished. To the skirthers of the road there was given a gallant sight—a single rider bearing down upon the river's unjumpable breadth. The water flew up in foam and spray two fathoms high, as horse and man went under. Next moment on the green bank rose the pair, dripping but unseparated—their feat achieved and honour sustained. Who was the bold stranger who thus set the Pytchley field and left us wondering, admiring, and envying? All honour to him, say all of us.

The rest of the hound-division, meanwhile, had struck a ford

and broken its guard-rail. Terrible confusion, some language, and some delay the steeplechaser made, I am told. And all came together at the railway crossing or after the next fifty acres, when hounds hovered a few seconds at the first whole-

some oxer. (I never forget a fence, I must interpolate. I can go back to this fence for one of my very earliest reminiscences—and still see Charles Payn, Captain English, Rev. W. Benn, and Mr. R. Fellowes, all taking it in their stride, but everyone leaving a pair of hind legs behind him. For, unaltered to this day, it has its first ditch, its hedge and ox-rail, and then its second ditch. Yet I saw no loose horses thereat this afternoon, for the timber broke honestly, after Mr. Goodwin and his bay mare had left it intact, and the farther ditch was well cattle-poached. For Heaven's sake don't clean it out, my lord, against our next coming!) The following fence, if I remember right, was very much akin; but the rail only yielded to the weight of threescore years and a short-backed sorrel. (How these fathers of families forget their responsibilities, when hounds really run,

and when they don't mean the said responsibilities shall take the shine out of them !) Hounds were now racing up the sweet flat valley for Kilworth Station, along a narrowed area we often cross but seldom follow. John turned aside with hounds across an ugly reeded bottom. Others willingly elected to ride parallel, and to lift three easy-swinging latches. They swooped on the scene now by the score. Yet everyone seemed at top speed ; and three fences hence they tackled another sterling and liberal oxer to a wider front than, I think, I ever saw granted to the old sweet combination. ('Tis such an enticing contrast, in its open ruggedness, to the almost invisible snare of modern devilment.) Believe me, sirs, the Pytchley is a riding field. Yet there was no crowd, and very little pressing upon the hounds—after twelve o'clock to-day. Goodall begged for his hounds a moment's grace as they crossed the canal by a bridge, under the Fishpond Spinney of Hemplow ; and we rose the great hill with all the vigour we could now muster (sixteen minutes from starting, and every horse breathing almost audibly against his girths).

The crest of the hill this good fox kept, while hounds made never a halt—nor did they even when he crossed over and took the Cold Ashby road for a mile, despairingly turned to the hill again, and zigzagged to Welford. There was still ample fun and the hardest of running, though description is limited to the northern neighbourhood of Welford's long village. Scent to view, and they killed the old fox very handsomely at the Naseby end of the parish in question. The very last minutes provided a strange necessity—not altogether unpleasurable, if the instance of seventeen stone from Market Harboro may be taken as legal evidence—to wit, the jumping of *three* fair brooks at fifty yards interval one from another, and the jumping of one of them back again. Certainly I for one never saw four pieces of water negotiated in the Shires in immediate sequence of any sort. Have I made myself clear ? This was a very fast run, with no positive check, and over first-rate country—full of enjoyment for all hands, and one that will help to glorify the

week, to add a leaf to the rapidly-increasing Pytchley wreath, and to mark a winter notable for scent and sport. In the hasty pencillings of an after-dinner sketch, the following names come readily—most or all of whose owners were well in the run, and who will well serve to illustrate a Pytchley field of 1889. Others there were of course, but memory is a feeble staff to lean upon, and especially feeble when the morrow is demanding preparatory rest—Lord Spencer, the Duchess of Hamilton, Lord Braye, Lord Erskine, Mr. and Mrs. Cross, Mr. and Mrs. Dalglish, Mr. and Mrs. Simson, Mr. and Mrs. Kennard, Mr. and Miss Czarnikow, Mrs. Byass (notably to the fore on her chesnut Harlequin), Mrs. Garnett, Miss Howard, Mrs. Pender, Miss Langham, Miss Naylor, Mrs. Jones, Mr. and Miss Hanbury, Miss Hargreaves, Miss Gilchrist, Majors Cosmo Little and Williams, Captains Atherton, Middleton, Orr-Ewing, Williams, Messrs. Atterbury (2), Adamthwaite, Bentley Bishop, H. Bourke, Budd, Cassell, Cazenove, J. A. Craven, Close, H. Craven, Cooper, G. Cunard, Douglass, the veteran Elkin and son, Ford, Foster, Gee (J. and G.), Greig, Goodwin, Gilbert, F. Hanbury, Harford, Hibbert, Hipwell, Jameson, D. Leigh, Loder, Mills and three redoubtable sons, Muntz, Onslow, Parnell, Rhodes, Schwabe, Sheriffe, Stevens, Wheeler, Wroughton.

Thursday, Dec. 19.—The Warwickshire at Long Itchington—and another gallop, as I will race the postman to tell. They had chopped a fox in the morning at Debdale's thorny sholah, and had found a second in the newly restored covert of Sawbridge—the farmers about which are bent upon having foxes in their midst, let times be what they may. And it is a district indeed for the game—this beautiful Warwickshire vale—level and wild, grass growing and slenderly inhabited. But with to-day's fox we could do little—except tumble about—this chiefly by reason of a trebly built hedge-and-ditch-compound surviving from some past century. But it was a Grandborough farmer who rode it into shape for us—as he is ready to do wherever occasion demands. From the Welsh Road Gorse the run came off—a run that for direction reminded one strongly of a prece-

dent of five years back. A fox left readily—instantly—for the Vale. And now the earth had warmed again from last night's rime. A substantial field remained, though quite half its number had retired—and the former were bent on a ride. Well, if hounds hadn't room for the next fifteen minutes, it was for no lack of pace on their part; for it seemed to me they had half a field to the good all the way. And *such* a country! Equal to the best of yesterday—not timbered so strongly; but exacting enough in its blackthorn strength, though ever practicable. What a thud men make on the turf when they fall at this speed! and how tough must the human frame be to stand such resounding shock! (Dine yourselves sparingly and steam your ribs warmly to-night, my two friends!) Thus to the Southam and Shuckburgh road and across it towards Stockton—the chief leaders being the Master, Messrs. B. Hanbury, Goodman, Schwabe, Greig, and two or three more. There was a minute's check on the banks of Napton Reservoir; then the lady pack went on of themselves by Calcot Gorse, and *by* themselves across the canal to Shuckburgh Hill. To follow them, we had to cross the canal first by a drawbridge, afterwards by a right or left *détour*—hounds running hard ahead for the east end of the Hill, and completely round it for the Hall. Thirty-five minutes to a check near here—more hunting, through the wood and to Flecknoe and back, for another half-hour. A delightful burst and an excellent hunt—how it ended I shall only learn at to-morrow's covert-side. Motto for the day—“Open rebuke is better than secret love.”

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

NOT the least happy part of all in my day's hunting is the look-back of the after-dinner cigar. I would almost as soon muse the day over then as ride it again; or twice as soon as talk it again. By myself I can draw my own retrospect, and run through the salient points of what I have seen, with no

side-issues to distract and no discussions to interrupt. What *you* jumped, what *I* jumped. What a wonderful horse I rode; what amount of attention courtesy demands that I should extend, or pretend to extend, to *you* before I proceed to pour further marvellous experiences of my own into your unwilling ears. These considerations have no place in the dreamer's bright vision. They belong to the pleasant surface—foam brought into being by the flow of converse and the outpour of comment, and that sparkles momentarily as the glass it accompanies. To the dreamer—given the needed solitude—the whole panorama comes again, vivid, unclouded, and in sequence, as in action it appeared to him—differently enough, possibly, from how it appeared to you. In the fragrant dream of this Christmas Eve—drowsy and slack though the day's downpour has left me—I can twist and turn through this familiar country, recall its hound work, its huntsman work, its field-play, its features and its incidents, far more closely and at far greater length than I should dare inflict upon you. I can see that dripping crowd—not a great, but a very fitting, fashionable, and representative little crowd—mustered at the edge of Crick's classical covert.

A fox had been found; but the fox wanted to go exactly where late arrivals were coming from (and if you remember the rain torrents of Tuesday morning, you will grant there was excuse for late arriving). The poor brute sallied forth twice, to be twice beaten back: and on a third occasion he was chased home for his life by a black sheep-dog. How murderously we felt towards that villanous colley! But even the best whip in England can seldom wind his thong properly round these marplot lurchers. A rare-hearted one was the Crick fox—a credit to his surroundings, and to the farmers who have made hunting possible and pleasurable again in this old-world paradise. For—poetry and exaggeration apart—if all we have seen and half we have been told be true, the Crick country may well be titled the “land of lost gods and godlike men.” And we “no-account men” may well be happy and proud to take our pleasure in it

again. The wire is all down, and the covert holds. To-day's fox, then, yet made good his way into the country from out the thorn thicket. By this time we had nearly lost hope of a run ; but soon were squeezing our way over the dangers of a broken bridge into the Watling Street, where the Old Road runs green and neglected through fields. And he followed it for a mile, then turned across a pretty flat for his old direction, Crick village and beyond. This beyond was eventually Watford Gorse ; and to get there we had a jovial Christmas ride, wherein hounds ran just fast enough at right times and the little world seemed full of go. A Merry Christmas indeed, indeed. No use have we for the old man in frost and icicles, for skates and for sledges, and such like polar barbarities, or for idle gluttony and patent pills. "A Green Christmas" may mean "a full churchyard," though for the life of me I can't see why—and of a verity it will not be of hunting-men for yet awhile. They seemed to have tried hard for a place, too, some of those who rode from Crick to Watford Gorse and thence to Winwick Warren—if muddied backs and crumpled hats were any testament to rashness. In no single case, I can aver, could blame be attached to the horse ! For, with assertion pronounced and instantaneous, came answer invariable to the query "Are you hurt?"—the formula "It wasn't the horse's fault at all, I assure you." All the world's a mart : at least all the Grass Countries are.

Whether a fresh fox, or not, from Watford Gorse I cannot say. But he made the route to Winwick Warren very enjoyable, and dispersed for us all the drawbacks of a tempestuous day. On arrival we were dry : and, soon after, having made up our minds quite a quarter of an hour earlier than the persevering huntsman we were busy with the sandwich-boxes. "Luncheon" they call it nowadays, as well warranted by the leather edifices that rise up, drink-and-food containing, half way to a second-horseman's shoulder-blades. A fortnight ago I chanced to take out for his first day's hunting a youth from school. The day at an end I asked him what he had seen.

"Oh, everything, till they stopped in the middle of the day for luncheon" he put it—adding, to prove that he had done his duty and to put in a claim to my approval, "I went on in the afternoon too, till the mare couldn't gallop any more." I have only to add of this Pytchley Tuesday that the fox to Winwick Warren beat us last week on the neighbouring ploughs; and Tuesday afternoon did nothing further, than bid us be thankful for our open Christmastide.

THE PLACE WHERE THE OLD HORSE DIED.

Saturday, Dec. 21.—Hunting is not all frolic. Still less is it all smooth sailing, or unbroken reliable gladness. Like all excitements, it has its blacker moments—so black that all light is for a while eclipsed, and the sun of existence is temporarily hid. Mere discomfort, such as Friday's, when, wet and cold, we went through the greater part of the day in positive physical pain, is regarded only as variety—as one of the forms in which we elect to take our pleasure. But now and again a blow falls, a catastrophe steps in that curdles all the milk of happiness we have lately so contentedly swallowed as our natural food. Ah, well, such blows have many degrees of weight, and it is good philosophy at all times for the smitten one to straighten his back, and to protest as cheerfully as he may: "It might have been worse." But I defy any man—who is a man—to go to bed without a heartache, under whose knees a favourite horse has that day come to the ground for ever. He may gloss over the pain that he won't acknowledge, while others are there to see and to sympathise (for foxhunting brotherhood is a very kindly tie). He may talk of the fortune of war, of a usual average of one dead horse a season, and of the old hunter having long ago paid for himself. He may even turn with no diminished force to the meal of the evening and to the pleasing distraction of laugh and converse. But he is a harder brute than I am if he does not wake in the night to a vision of the old horse's up-

turned imploring head ; or if he is not haunted for many a day by the memory of the agonised, wondering, eye, appealing to him for help he could not give, and that seemed to beseech him not to move away, as he left the scene while another fired the miserable shot. A really bold, a really generous horse is not under one every day—let the exchequer be ever so well supported, or the stud ever so carefully and lavishly compiled. A horse for whom no fence is a terror, but for whom timber, water, and blackthorn have a like fascination, for whom hounds seldom run too fast, and whom other horses can never pound (riders being willing and equal), is *priceless property*, I tell you, to a man who loves a fast run and rejoices in a grass country. It is not a little debt to owe you, old Hercules, that you carried me as a nurse would carry a crippled baby, when I clung to you across the Boddington Vale—in that best of gallops last winter with the Bicester—and when a crushed limb and a bed-enfeebled frame was your burden and responsibility. We came through it all right, old fellow ; God bless you for it. (For why has not an honest horse a soul to bless, as much as any vice-eaten man ?) And for many a thrilling gallop and for many a forward place am I indebted to you, old horse, who knew not the meaning of fear, but begged ever and hard at the bridle to give you leave and liberty to go. We were caught in a trap, old friend ; a trap that I ought to have known. The pace and your gallantry did it. A coward would have halved it in safety ; your pluck was strength and your doom ; but you died within sight of the kennel, and your brave spirit shall go with your bones, in the good cause of drive and of dash and of killing the fox.

That daring spirit knew
The task beyond the compass of his stride,
Yet he faced it true and brave,
And dropped into his grave.

It was the double fence under Berrydale Gorse—the double that only a week ago floored two better men, and, perhaps, one as good horse—the little bay mare of Cold Ashby. Of course,

I can tell you no more, nor would I if I could see the paper, or were publishers' guineas piled on it by the score this night. But they ran back to the very "place where the old horse died," and blew hounds out of covert just as the gun went.

THE BATTLE GROUND OF NASEBY.

THE feeling uppermost in one's mind on Friday evening, December 27, is, Thank God for a good day's hunting. If a man could not enjoy those two cheery days, he was either clumsy, badly mounted, or by nature unappreciative; and, in the latter case, the sooner he is put to the plough the better. Those runs take more thinking out than I can pretend to give to them to-night, while the cold, stinging breeze still clings to one's eyelids, and but little remains in the after-evening save a sense of drowsy, grateful satisfaction. A long drive (in my case) in the teeth of the wind, "nor'-east, most forbiddingly keen," opened the morning prospect for what was to come, and sent one's blood to innermost recesses, thence, happily, to be brought, coursing and warming, to reanimate every vein. The cold winds of Old England are more piercing in their intensity than all the low figures of Transatlantic thermometer. They cut through you, however well wrapped, in dog-cart or buggy. When I'm a millionaire, a brougham and the morning paper shall suffice for me. Now I only start out on wheels that I may come home less tired, and that I may get astride old Pegasus without stiffness and without a groan.

The scene of the day was the highest tableland of England, the battlefield of Naseby and thereabouts—the aneroid of one's blood registering plainly each mile of the climb to the higher level. How good a field came to do justice to the good things of the day you may in some degree judge from the following incomplete and random list. And most of these were helping themselves gratefully to all that came in their way—making

out a happy Christmastide, and seeing the Old Year out with honour and satisfaction.

Naseby Covert is a great thorn thicket planted on the deep clay that dragged down the war-worn horses of the Cavaliers, and did more to place a Royal neck beneath the heel of Demos and beneath the cruel axe than aught else in the career of the rebellion. But it was only the pleasantest image of a fight that was to be enacted to-day; and I will unravel its somewhat tangled threads as quickly and as lucidly as in me lies. Our fox was first driven back by a crowd of footpeople; but 10 minutes later he found a rift through their midst, and by some means or other made good his dash for liberty. And now we were carried past the village of Naseby by such garden and suburb route as a wily determined fox would choose. Soon we were riding on, scent freshening, adown the dells and gorsey dingles that pave the way to the rough hogs-back of Purser's Hill, and rounding its extreme right corner found ourselves creeping rapidly along its wooded summit to the left and east. Taking the greener slope of the Cottesbroke aspect, we rode fast to an easy line and a fast running pack, past the hillside coverts of Blueberry, &c., nearly to Berrydale; then bent still more leftward for the best of the pace and the best of the run. Even on the red ploughs, scent was excellent in the cold easterly wind; and as the pack dipped into the rough, and usually scentless, hollow of Maidwell Dale, it became necessary to edge carefully on, if one would not miss the dart and delight of the next quarter hour. Lord Spencer, Messrs. Jameson, Wroughton, Harford, Muntz, Hanbury and Mills (père), and some half-dozen others, were far too well on the alert to be slipped (a fate that temporarily befell a number of good men at this period), and these former jumping quickly from the cart road of the arable to the free turf on their left hand, were soon over the hill and the road twixt Scotland Wood and Hazlebeech—to plunge downward again with the screaming pack over the sweet-scenting pastures to Tally-ho Covert.

I think I am right in saying that this part of our wide, merry circle was the cheeriest and fastest of all. On the ploughs beyond Tally-ho hounds checked for some moments; but ere we reached Naseby Covert again (just an hour from the find) every horse had his lungs working at high pressure, and every rein was wet and slippery with the damp of exertion. Yet horses are fit and muscular now as the winter is likely to find them; and the upper ground we had crossed had none of the stickiness of Naseby field. The brook beneath Tally-ho, and the timber-built fences roundabout, were very delectable jumping, and, say what you will, by no means the worst of Northamptonshire is the going quickly and gaily from one green field into another. Else would Brighton Downs command a crowd, or the Craven be one of the popular Hunts of the kingdom. And this glorious attribute must be maintained, this priceless characteristic must not be marred, whatever the cost, whatever the effort, on the part of all to whom country life is of value. But this can be effected only by combination, and on a basis broader than any yet promulgated. To continue my story:—The Naseby fox had made his way right through the covert, and also through the spinney of Longhold beyond—hounds driving him, with their bristles up, nearly to Clipston Village. Now came the luckless part of the run. A fresh fox, it seems, almost met hounds face to face at the Clipston road. Their utterly beaten fox crawled the hedges for the next half-hour, unable to leave the immediate vicinity. But, albeit Goodall got back to his line at length, he failed to pick him up on the foiled ground—though told afterwards by a labourer that “all the while he was watching the fox lying down in a double hedgerow; but dursn’t holloa for fear he should be doing wrong.” A wholesome principle, but in this new instance acted upon with a result that robbed a fine run of its merited finish.

Then of that quick ring of the afternoon, when for 45 minutes we were bustling, tearing, straining on—whirling round till we were fairly giddy. Again it was from the little gorse of Berry-

dale, and it began with a curl in the Cottesbrooke Basin. Such a scent was there that hounds raced madly one against another—turning and darting wherever their fox had gone, and sometimes even driving with equal intensity and music along both sides of a fence he had followed. For our horses, we never got a pull until Maidwell Dale had been pierced again at the same spot as in the morning, and a momentary check gave us breathing time as we issued. Then forward over the road, to the left of Scotland Wood—Mr. Wroughton and Mr. Harford again giving us the lead—to Kelmarsh Dale. Through the gully they hunted, then forward suddenly and furiously again over the rich grass uplands, with Captain Middleton, Mr. Jameson, and Mr. Pender pointing out each loophole as it came. So by Tally-ho covert again, over the little brook, and up similar pastures, at similar pace, to Hazlebeech village, and on to Maidwell Dale once more. This plough-girt ravine always seems a sad spoil-sport. It is true that hounds had flown through it twice to-day. But now its depths were foiled, and a halt ensued which cost Goodall his fox. He made him out eventually into Berrydale, and there left him in possession of his home. Such a scenting day I have seldom seen.

COLD AND WARMTH.

IN the first old book I pick up—when weary with gazing on the bleak colourless prospect of what should be one of the greenest and fairest views of Midland scenery—instinct guides me, all unawares, to the following—

“As when the wintry winds have seized the waves of the mountain-lake—have seized them in stormy night, and clothed them over with ice; white, to the hunter’s early eye, the billows still seem to roll. He turns his ear to the sound of each unequal ridge. But each is silent, gleaming, strewn with boughs and tufts of grass, which shake and whistle to the wind, over their grey seats of frost.” It is translated from old Irish, in which strange as it may seem, grand poems were once written; and

in which some of the loftiest imagery of war and of the chase have alike been couched. Is it not a picture of Winter's sudden desolation?

There is something almost appalling—quite subduing—in the stillness of a fog-frost following immediately upon the rush of action and excitement belonging to recent weeks. Sport—high-class sport—had become a matter of daily routine. We seemed to wrap ourselves in it each morning as we donned our coat of colour or fixed our spurs for the fray. We even grew hypercritical and captious; were satisfied only if pace, country, point and finish were, all and each, completely to our liking; and thought ourselves ill-used if now and again we only tired one horse in the day instead of two. Practically emphatically—and thankfully—I for one declare that never, in a quarter of a century of hunting in Shireland (put the beginning as young as possible, please) have I known such an autumn—such two months of brilliant, consecutive, sport. Every pack was running hard nearly every day. No matter where you placed your choice, you were never successfully met on the morrow with “Ah! Where were you yesterday? You should have been with *us* to see a run!” It is no just reproach that, like the rest of common mortals, you can only be in one place at a time. Yet this should be the only drawback to the memory of November and December, 1889, at least for those whose stables withstood the pressure. If in all cases it was *not* the only one, has been due to individual accident, having no bearing upon the season in its abstract perfection. Hunting men and women no more than others—less, probably, than any others—wear their heart upon their sleeve, or flaunt its cuts and bruises to the crowd's inquiring eye. Every skeleton is left securely locked in the home cupboard; and beaming vivacity and lightheartedness reign supreme. Has not the principle been grasped and worded long ago, by the pen of all pens that is lost to us—

It is good for a heart that is chilled and sad,
With the death of a vain desire
To borrow a glow that will make it glad
From the warmth of a kindred fire.

And if warmth and distraction could not be found in these first merry months, of a season that is now, alas, near midway on its fleeting course—then is fox-hunting no specific, a ride to hounds no panacea. Honestly do I believe that—till that fickle and mysterious attribute Nerve disappears, taking with it the taste that few other disasters can subdue—the fox-hunting enthusiast is at times more nearly in touch with perfect, regretless, happiness than any other being that runs his earthly allotment. Of the fisherman's frenzy I confess to knowing little, and of the botanist's bliss still less—though I am led to believe that each has its ecstasies. It is even said that golf has its moments of furious joy; and that the solemn lictors who walk round with their bundle of sticks are at times the most jubilant of men.

There is a pleasure sure
In being mad which none but madmen know.

Our particular pleasure has been taken under conditions more than usually facile and enhancing. Nowhere has there been a scarcity of the game we sought; seldom have we been beaten about by the elements; and not even yet, after such storms as have swept over us, have we been called upon to ride through ground deep and holding. The last fact in itself means double enjoyment, half the number of falls, and half the number of lame horses.

How quickly and readily is a vista formed. I mean not the bright, or speculative, vista of the future, but the misty, fading, channel that takes us to the past! How other minds may be constituted is only a matter of surmise. But to my mediocre temperament the past is so quickly swallowed up, and lost, in the present, that only by an effort can I bring to temporary life what is shrouded in a few days' forgetfulness. Well, if the bright things stood out in all their brightness, surely the black and gloomy incidents—the disappointments that make up the bulk of existence—would overcloud the picture. It is best we should see it dimly; and best of all that we can work memory's machinery to call back what

we cherish. What we hate, and what we regret, will crop up unbidden—exorcise them as we will.

But to-day, Thursday of the New Year, fox-hunting has gone back into its case, as it were. The telescope, through which we prolonged the view and pierced the distance while we could, has gone to with a bang; and now we pace the quarterdeck with never a sail in sight—nothing living between us and the horizon, of the sphere we have chosen for our winter's cruise.

Saturday was the beginning of the end, of the round of sport belonging to 1889. To Badby Wood came all the Christmas crowd—not so much of horse (for surely fields are smaller this season) but of foot and of chariot. The hunt commenced admirably for these two latter great divisions, whose zest for fox-hunting is every bit as keen as belongs to those on saddleback. For in five minutes a fox was killed in their very midst. Ten minutes later the chase had gone from them, had swept across the Newnham Valley, and disappeared over the yonder hill—the red-sand peak that overlooks Daventry and peers across to Coventry in distant Warwickshire. Stragglers marked the route for half an hour more, as is customary from Badby Wood, in whose depths the art of self-interment is practised to a degree beyond compare. Then the chase and its every vestige had gone for the day, to complete a twenty minutes' road-and-grass scurry to ground at Dodford, and next to journey by cold slow steps yet farther afield—half a dozen miles as the crow flies (and the crow, you know, is no flyer) to Althorpe Park, and to ground. I thought, by the way, that I had learned something of soldiering; and I remember well that the Goosestep and Extension motions constituted fundamental lessons in the art of war. But I never knew till to-day that these martial exercises had any useful application to the gentler pursuits of peace. They have, though; as you might have seen for yourself had you formed part of the Pytchley field of Saturday, completely blocked from a road by a flock of sheep huddled in a gateway.

Why, sir, two veteran dragoons set things right directly. Dismounting on the instant, and throwing bridle-reins to the nearest comrade, they thrust themselves between the sheep and the gate—and with shout and holloa played goosetep and third-practice-extension in the faces of the astonished ewes. The performance was over all too quickly. The whole flock turned in terror from balanced legs and waving arms, and fled precipitately.

A CURE FOR INFLUENZA.

Wednesday, Jan. 8th.—A very Hemplow morning. Let not this expression be misconstrued into any aspersion upon what I would rather term the backbone of the Pytchley country. But, personally, I don't like these Pytchley Grampians in a morning, after Christmas. There are too many people on such occasions for quiet mountain hunting. They get round the coombes and sholahs, and give a fox but indifferent chance of making the country. They envelope the slopes and summits as in a cavalry fieldday on the Fox Hills, of Aldershot's school-field. Yet a first fox went before they had fairly manned the heights; and for a quarter of an hour afterwards they trooped down to the drain that had given him shelter, half a mile off. Of the second fox I remember most that the pack could hunt him splendidly along a road, and very little elsewhere. What became of him?—bother this epidemic, I forget. But I can recall that, with a scent suddenly freshening, they fairly raced another fox from Lord Spencer's covert across the gated two-mile course to the Hemplow. And yet, by some ingenious iniquity the mob were at the far end of the hills before him, to drive him back to a rabbit-hole. "Oh, for a Master. Oh, for a man!" Another lucid interval reveals to me the flying start from Yelvertoft Fieldside. Our fox had swum the canal from covert to the spinney beyond; and hounds were skying across the meadows before men had realised there was occasion to

move. A small division was on the high ground above the covert. These had to sweep to the left hand bridge, strike for the line of chase from that starting-point, and take their chance at the Yelvertoft Bottom as they met it here. It was negotiable, at the pace—and may possibly be so in cold blood too. For there is virtue, I am told, in cold blood; and better valour in cool calculation than in hot impulse. But it isn't given to the foxhunter of ordinary mould—nor, truth to tell, does he crave it. (Was it not rather mortifying, though, to hit this wide nullah off at a spot where there was just room to land on the further bank, but impetus failed to carry over, or break through, the rails beyond? High timber is not readily to be jumped at a stand; and the position forbade much choice of action. How relief ever came to the predicament is something I have yet to learn.)

The next fence had also a wide and woolly cavern in front; and the flyers rolled over it by twos and by threes. Up the gentle slope towards Yelvertoft Village the leaders were rapidly getting on terms with hounds—the left van headed by one, “in mien and garb a youthful chieftain;” while to his right, making strong play, was a proven warrior “yet a very man, not cast in mould too fine for human love.”* But the old hogmaned charger had been enjoying nearly a moon of honeyed idleness; and round he came from sheer friskiness—to be cautioned with a double crack on his fat ribs that sounded like a brace of pistol shot. A shepherd turned our fox. (No shepherds, no grass countries. No grass countries,—the deluge, again, as soon as possible). So the gallop was rather nipped in its bud—to blossom again awhile in another direction, which brought us back to the Yelvertoft Bottom—this time with an assisting or deceptive, hedge before it. Two men got down; two men just got over; while the public again sought a bridge. Then we had several merry minutes by the left of Yelvertoft Village, to ground not far from Crack's Hill—

* Our bridegroom of the year.

the country superb, the pace good enough, and not a youth going more gaily than the veteran Mr. Gordon, of the Fitzwilliam. Our fox might possibly have done more for us yet, but the terrier had him out so quickly, that we had not cleared the course. And poor Reynard, starting as it were before the flag fell, took the wrong course and was met by hounds. Thus ended the fourth hunt of the day. But appetites were only whetted. Just the opportunity for Crick Gorse on the quiet. And thither we went. Yet so long were hounds in covert without a note that even the little party were soon diminished by half, and only a forlorn hope remained. But the off-chance came off this time; and suddenly we awoke to Goodall's horn. Hounds had more than their legitimate start (an uncertain and attenuated quantity, too, in these times and places); and were speeding ahead, with the two good yeomen Messrs. Cooper and Martin in nearest pursuit. Then I remember a gate that had every appearance of being locked, and half-a-dozen men pulling up to fumble. With the ready eye of one who has no fear for a few thorns but a wholesome respect for the stronger forms of impediment, I went for the gap immediately alongside—to undergo, while in the air, some such sensation as a swimmer's at the sight of a shark. About five feet from the ground a bright barbed wire stretched from side to side. What became of it I know not; for it was gone with the shriek of agony that I made believe to be a caution to comrades, but that was in reality the outcry of a terrified soul. And I merely mention this episode as showing that even in well-disposed districts a dangerous strand may be left here and there—the shepherd arguing that such and such a spot will never be chosen to jump. After a slight check on the Crick-and-Lilbourne bridle-lane we went forward blithely—a strong, but clean-cut and charming, country opening to our front—the beautiful valley, in fact, 'twixt the villages of Lilbourne and Yelvertoft; and across which, you may remember, we rode with so much happy zest about the end of last season, from Lilbourne Gorse. We had now a bold hearted fox before us; for he crossed each field

as he struck it, nor turned aside once for a sheltering hedge. Nearly every fence had been newly laid; but every fence was within compass—and they varied from oxer to double, from timber to bog. Yet I saw no grief, and I believe that little, if any, happened. I tell you, sirs, it *was* fun. But would that it had lasted longer. They shepherd their flocks very closely in this region of Yelvertoft. Our friend of the crook was in the way again; and so limited our career, at speed, to some fifteen minutes. Through the epidemic's bleared memory I can scarce tell off even so slender a roll-call as comprised the evening's attendance on hounds. But, besides the Duchess of Hamilton, Mrs. Dalgleish, and Miss Hanbury, there were, if I mistake not, Captains Atherton, Riddell, and Soames, Messrs. Adamthwaite, Arkwright, Baring, G. Cunard, J. Cooper, Foster, Greig, Jameson, Langham-Reid, Martin, Mildmay, Pender, Rhodes, Wroughton. And the greatest of these, I take leave to say, was Mr. Jameson on the grey.

Overheard during the run. Injured and indignant official, to shepherd whose colley has just returned panting from pursuit of the fox—"Can't you keep your dog in?" Response "What are ye a' talking of? My dog's just as much right a' running on him as yourn 'ave!"

An incident of the morning was the sharp collapse and complete somersault (I believe, and hope, unattended by any serious result) of two hardriders simultaneously at an apparently easy hedge-and-ditch, and immediately afterwards, of a third, in a still more unlooked-for manner. 'This last jumped out of a road with entire success; and his horse went on without dwelling. What then? Did he leave the saddle? Not a bit of it. But the saddle left the horse; and the two component parts of the turn-out that remained together went on a journey of their own—describing a parabola at about right angles to the original line of flight. The girths had parted in the effort of the jump. It is a matter of wonder that this does not more often happen. People treat themselves to new stirrup leathers pretty often—partly because they show sufficiently to speak

for themselves, as to their trustworthiness. But it is not so with girths. Owners seldom look at them—still less at the weak and easily-rotted webbing to which the girth straps are attached. And even grooms, you know, are little better than mere mortals. For my part, with the nervous caution of a child who has been burnt by many fires, I treat myself to new girths, new webbing and straps, and new leathers, directly my old saddles require them—considering this outlay more justifiable than that upon a new yellow saddle when mine grows black and unsightly, and arguing that of all falls, voluntary and obligatory, none is more unpleasant than one brought about by broken harness.

Thursday, Jan. 16.—Kill or cure was a day's foxhunting; and a few lines shall describe the cure—the recipe being Ladbroke Gorse thirty minutes. *Sumat celeriter cum impedimentis.* W. DE B.

The above taken hot, and on a young one that wanted expanding with a cutting whip all the way, constituted a medicine that I can conscientiously recommend to all influenza-stricken patients, and that is obviously more palatable than watergruel, hot bottles, and a general course of reflection and misery in a sick bed. Yet the latter proffered itself as Hobson's choice (a point I mention only as apology for a very meagre letter) until the morning came out so warm, so quiet, and hunting-like. The Warwickshire were in their wildest, grassiest, country; and a great field followed upon the Hunt Ball of overnight. Ladbroke Gorse has this season been subjected to mange and consequent costly thinning-out. But it held a brace of foxes to-day—one for the refreshment of the ballgoers, the other for that of the hungry pack. The latter chopped their game in covert, while an earlier fox was stealing his way over the country. Thus it was only after a few wild fields of the bridle path towards Shuckburgh that hounds really took up the going. Then for some twenty-five minutes more they led us over a level and enjoyable line much akin to that of the last gallop from Welsh Road Gorse. Passing to the

right beneath that covert they went pretty straight, and fairly fast, to Stockton Village, where he worked us out of scent. I hardly like to speak in fun of a runaway—for the position of the unwilling passenger is serious, exhausting and bewildering. But in kindness to others, and in consideration for the many trials a huntsman has already to contend with, I venture to suggest to the owner, or victim, of the brown horse who *would go*, that the next time he takes part in the uncomfortable performance, he should at once head for the covert he came from, or, failing that, for the brow of Shuckburgh Hill. In my experience hounds seldom go fast enough to admit of a bolter being galloped down in direct pursuit of them, added to which the unprepared public is slow to realise that a shout from their rear means instant clearance or deserved annihilation.

SNATCHED IN THE SNOW.

FEBRUARY the first is to the hunting season very much as his fortieth birthday is to a man—the Divide of his career, the summit of his hill of life. From this point there is less pleasure in looking forward, probably less satisfaction in looking back. The cup is half empty : we shall soon see the bottom, or arrive at the dregs. In hunting the fox there is fortunately—at least to the real votary—no weariness, no loss of zest, no knuckling-under to disappointment. As long as a man can sit in a saddle, he may be as happy in old age as in boyhood. It is the holidays of summer that alone make him count his years. And with February 1st come the earliest signs of a waning season. The weekly fixture cards, always sacredly preserved, have accumulated almost into a pack : forelegs, that in November were fine as stars and clean as the heavens on a frosty night, have now to be bound and guarded with unsightly bandages ; “calls of business” frequently rob the covert-side of keen men whom nothing but want of a horse would keep away—these are some of the tokens of an open winter and of three months wear-and-tear.

(Three months! It is as yesterday we pulled on our boots for the opening day!) Soon we shall hear about lambs: and already the hound-puppies are being sent in for fear of damage to the flocks. The violets, it would seem, have migrated to London *en masse*: but the turf is ready to shoot forth in new green to the next warm sunny day. Our second winter—lasting but twenty-four hours—only seized us on Wednesday morning last. We had read of heavy snow and of frost intense all round the world; but our tight little island was spared, and fox-hunting went on, careless of rainstorm and hurricane. But on Wednesday we thought our turn had come. By road to meet the Pytchley at North Kilworth was a journey awesome and perilous; for water was everywhere, and that water was now ice. By rail was a sorry period of anxiety and ignorance—a full consciousness of the disagreeables of early rising and a dislike of the position (the possibility of going by train *not* to hunt). Yet the railway is allowedly a convenient and often economical covert-hack; and the Pytchley country is a wide domain.

Hounds came to covert at a leisurely walk. It was difficult to imagine they could travel the ploughs—while, as for our jumping the fences, surely that could not be: for the turf was hidden by snow and the gateways were as rough granite! You shall see—as quickly as I can get this knocked off, within my allotted limits.

To-day again our master was unable to put in an appearance, even on wheels. This open and brilliant season has brought no pleasure to Mr. Langham, who so long has catered admirably for the sport and pleasure of others, and to whom we owe gratitude and sympathy more than I can attempt to express.

About noon we walked on to Kilworth Sticks; and of the earlier part of the day it will do to note that a brace of foxes were hunted into North Kilworth Village—there apparently to avail themselves of the same drain. The run came later, when we had almost tired of kicking snowballs in each others' faces and the most sanguine had nearly abandoned hope—when we had little to think of as far as the day was concerned, except,

perhaps, to wonder which of all forms of impediment is the most disagreeable for a big field, and in the end awarding the palm (1) to red-ribboned tails (the kicker's badge), (2) to single gateways and sidling horses.

I can tell you where the gallop began, but for the life of me dare not aver where, or when, the hunt commenced—or of how many pieces it was formed. There is a square spinney by the canal side about half-way between the villages of South Kilworth and Welford. As the lengthy caravan drew towards it, hounds were to be seen in the sunlight drifting over the hill towards Welford, unaccompanied and even unfollowed. They had put the canal to their good: and, for all we could help it, might be away on their own account to Sulby. This meant, of course, a travelling fox—and, luckily for us, this fox was well forward. I will not ask you to dawdle with me round the skirts of the Hemplow, or to slip uselessly about its snow-covered side-hills. A fox long gone, on cold snow, is no better than hare. Yet I think you too might have pricked your ears had you seen Goodall gather his hounds for a dash forward beyond the Yelvertoft end. Mr. G. Gee had a theory at once. He knew of a fox that lived on the canal bank. “Depend on it. He’s afoot already.” And I believe he was right. The suggestion, too, was endorsed by the most fox-hunting carter that ever loaded a “muck-cart.” “He come out just here and slipped back again. Very like he’s doubled along the canal bank.” That man was born to be a huntsman. The miserable humour of fate had alone condemned him to substitute a dung-fork for a hunting-horn. His fox had, indeed, slipped back—Goodall left the little ladies to explain how—and now, I say, the fun began. Our new-found fox couldn’t possibly make the Hemplow. A string of two hundred on horseback cut him off from that—and promptly he showed what other country he knew. The snow seemed at once to melt from beneath our feet, the heavens brightened, and the world seemed warmer. For why? We were away up wind, with a drive and an earnestness that the day had not yet known. A few minutes later we were travers-

ing the fair line that we rode, you remember, a month ago (Swinford Old Covert to Welford it was then). We even struck two of its gaps—for the quickest of gallops seldom fails to leave in each fence a hole that a half-a-crown would scarcely mend. But we held north this time instead of south, and faced the freezing breeze, as it blew from South Kilworth Covert. The railway that plays havoc with this Garden of Eden had all the wickedness knocked out of it at first encounter. "It'll do there, John!" And the ever-ready John made it do, by going in and out cleverly on the baldnosed bay—giving confidence to a vast number of us who would no more have thought of attacking a railway than of riding a steam engine barebacked.

Things went on happily till we reached the water beneath the covert. I read that all the streams of Europe are in full flood this week. The young Avon certainly is. We looked for a ford but found none. But the local pilots went at once for a bridge. Our fox cared nothing for the covert; threw it on his right hand, and pointed for Misterton—the pace continuing, and the ground growing wetter and sloshier at every stride (thank Heaven I am now no man's valet—though I took my turn as a fag at Rugby). This was no crucial burst that calls for my hazarding statements as to who cut out the work here, who was near the pack there. Everybody was busy; and a large number were close to hounds—never pressing them, however, till a great rearguard came up with a rush at North Kilworth (for by this time hounds had turned right, and should with any luck have pursued the even tenor of their way to the death). We were taken to within a field or so of Kilworth Sticks (perhaps a four-mile point); then a crawling fox was hunted up to a holloa behind the village. Isn't this a delightful country? And—by the way—are you old enough to have seen Charles Kean in the "Corsican Brothers?" He was a clean-shaved, square-faced man, was he not? (No aspersion in these adjectives, I trust.) But he never thought of such sympathy of instinct as I witnessed to-day. Two brothers came into a field from very diverse points. There could be only one outlet—yet the world looked

for it in vain. The brothers had it in a moment, by a common prompting that could have suggested itself only to one of them—and to that one by an intuitive talent shared by no one else. “He pitied his poor brother Fabian, and laughed as he raced for the gap.”

Much more to the point was the retort of two burly farmers of Kilworth—on foot both of them, but radiant with kindly pleasure as they holloaed the beaten fox and held a gate open into the road. To them the passing sinner, having broken at least three flights of rails during the day, and knocked down all the loose thorns he could find. “We’ve given your land a rare dressing to-day. Hope you don’t mind?” “*Quite right too! We love to see you come across here!!*” Show me better feeling than this, gentlemen; and I’ll admit there is a better land than the Shires!

Our fox made good the canal-spinney by Welford Station, ran its length, and then there was holloaing in two directions. Hounds kept a line; but here it must have been that they changed from their quarry. Forty-five minutes, or thereabouts, up to Bosworth Park—dating from the turn back from Hemplow and the sudden accession of pace. Human prescience could scarcely be expected to prompt the ordinary subject to dive for his watch at such exact moment. It occurred to one that they might *now* run, and we hurried on upon the offchance. But that the next half hour should be excellent, and three-quarters should be all hard-running, seemed anything but likely.

In the spurt of the first early minutes across the vale, I can remember seeing Mr. Hipwell (and who with better right—for did we not riddle his fences heartily three times that day?) Messrs. E. Baring, B. Chester, Guthrie, Jameson, Sheriffe, Atterbury, and Adamthwaite, with the huntsman and five or six more, in the far van.

They followed a fresh fox from Bosworth up into the highlands of Marston, where the snow, and his start, fairly beat them.

GREAT RUN OF THE PYTCHLEY FROM
KNIGHTLEY WOOD.

REMARKABLE as the great season of 1889—90 was for long runs (especially in the Daventry neighbourhood) it had nothing to compare with that of the Pytchley on Saturday, Feb. 18, when they made a *sixteen-mile point* in two hours, and ran a *brace of foxes* to ground at the finish !

Facts unadorned by fancy are fortunately the most suitable diet for the sportsman's digestion ; and these I am able to give him, as rendered by reliable witnesses and participators. He can then draw his own conclusions, or adopt their encomiums if he thinks fit. For me it remains merely to locate the scene and convey my information as a score of kind friends give it me.

The Pytchley, then, had held their yearly meet at Weedon Barracks, with a view to the at least annual draw of the fine woodlands, just south of this soldier's elysium (as it may, and ought to be, deemed). Woodlands they scarcely are ; but, rather, detached little woods, such as foxes and huntsmen alike appreciate—where the former can scarcely be disturbed by sheepdogs or terriers, and where the latter can always be with their hounds. Dry and quiet and warm are these : and this is the time of year when travelling foxes come to them from afar. Yet already the Grafton (in whose hands the hunting of them is mainly left) have had at least two runs—fast and far—from Knightley Wood, the source of Saturday's almost phenomenal chase : the two led them a long distance upon the track of Saturday.

The "run of the century" an ex-master deems it—and no better judge than he. "The finest run I have ever seen," write several trusty members of the Whitecollar Hunt. "One of the best runs that ever occurred in the memory of any living sportsman," is the enthusiastic testimony of a staunch and straightgoing yeoman. "A marvellous hunt," is the verdict of a capital soldier : and "the straightest, most engrossing, and (for a long run) the quickest I ever rode" is the opinion of

another tried sportsman who has had experience of many countries.

What an absolutely perfect day for sport and for pleasurable riding was Saturday, I can testify from the breath of its balmy quiet—as I sat for five minutes on Weedon platform (when carting my damaged limb Londonwards), and they told me of the great meet that had just taken place.

Knightley Wood is but a stone's throw (well, a quarter of a mile) to the south of Mantel's Heath (a similar wood): and Knightley Wood had been entered from the east as if to keep Reynard within Pytchley dominion. How far it succeeded you will see. Past Mantel's Heath runs a road east and west, Stowe-to-Preston; and this was blocked with equipages and loiterers. Thus Reynard lost, I should imagine, several minutes in breaking through; for he touched Mantel's Heath, then had to make a short *détour* towards Everdon Stubbs before sinking the valley of the Everdon Brook and getting his mask in the required direction (westward or leftward). And if the temporary difficulty hindered him—how much more it would seem to have hindered the bulk of the great field of the day! Most of them wavered in the road; many went down it towards Everdon Stubbs (the map will be of service to you now)—while hounds were wheeling beneath them, and their confusion was already assured. Instinct, knowledge of country, or the luckier fortune of war, however, induced Mr. Craven and Mr. Walton to turn in above Hen Wood and dash down the slope for Snorscombe Farm—there to strike the bridle road for the Fawsley home estate, and soon to cut in with the pack on its flying course thither. Meanwhile Lord Annaly, Mr. Byass, Major Little, Mr. Wroughton, the younger, Mr. Craven, and about a dozen others had followed Goodall and John in the track of hounds: and turned with them below the brow. Even aided by ready and sufficient gates, and with the turf riding like velvet on springs, riders could scarcely gallop fast enough to keep with hounds across these great feeding-pastures, as they swept by Hoggstaff Wood and went with a curve to the

right to the patch of gorse on the hillside by Church Charwelton. Just previous to this—among the double hedgerows wherein, as some of you may remember, the Grafton a couple of years ago killed three foxes almost together—a brace were before hounds. Probably a fresh one jumped up as they passed: for they went on paying no attention to him in view. Rounding the church and its plantation (where culminated the great Braunston gallop of two seasons ago) the little party struck the bridge across the brook-dam—two amenable double fences coming in their way just beyond. And so they held on, over wide, wellgated, bullock grounds still, till they hit a single field of arable by Hinton House—and hounds had to put their noses down for a moment, while riders took a first brief pull at their horses.

The pace at starting—after slipping the crowd—had prevented any connected following; so that, after the group of a dozen or twenty in front, there were scarcely links enough to bring on the lengthening tail, though there was the bridleroad close handy on the left, and the Daventry-to-Byfield turnpike on the right—each within one field of the line of hounds. The latter went on unassisted; crossed the main road just mentioned, and left Byfield to their left—running hard and well on the right of the road to Upper Boddington. This too they turned over short of the village and just beyond the reservoir—the little stream feeding it having caused more than one fall. Mr. Waring on his grey—having at his heels little Miss Byass on her chestnut pony—was there to cheer them over, a few men jumping out of the road to cross the brow between Upper and Lower Boddington, the rest taking due advantage of the still convenient macadam. The Bicester meeting-place (where I regret to learn, the good veteran Mr. Cowper has been for some time kept within doors) was passed—that and the little village remaining to the left, as also the parallel lane to Claydon, which was most useful after crossing the East and West Junction Railway. Besides those above-mentioned, there

were, amongst others in the front about this period, Mr. and Mrs. Pender, Mr. J. Cooper, Mrs. Vaughan, Mr. Burton, Captain Atherton, Messrs. R. and S. Loder, Mr. Mackenzie, Captain Little (9th), &c. After leaving Claydon Village behind him, their fox ran the road for quite two hundred yards in sight of the huntsman, though unfortunately hounds did not catch a view. He then crossed the Great Western Line, and a slight check by Mollington Village gave him fresh ground—a fourth and final piece of plough—out of the whole distance—causing the hesitation. Mr. Mackenzie's horse was now in the condition already attained by many more; but, making sure the end must be at hand, he tied him up in a barn, and set forward upon foot. Half a mile further Lord Annaly got a severe fall, but was able to remount at once. But in spite of the sound ground, and withal that lanes and roads and gates had rendered such frequent assistance, progress had become a matter of general difficulty. Goodall was fortunately on his galloping grey, but, it may be mentioned, Mrs. Byass was riding a four-year-old, and Mrs. Vaughan only a hireling. The tiny brook at Mollington was not sufficient to stop them; but the steep ground beyond, as they faced the hill to Warmington, induced several of the heavier weights to use their own legs to the summit. Hounds then turned again down hill, sharp to the right and entered the fox covert—two foxes being at this period immediately in front of them. One had gone out at the top of the gorse; and was immediately followed to ground at the spinney on the hilltop adjoining. Intelligence, however, was brought up by Captain Longfield, that another, thoroughly beaten, fox had also left the covert, by way of the double fence on the lower ground. Goodall took hounds back at once; but was unable to come up with this (probably his original fox) before he, too, got to ground—at Rattley upon Edgehill (actually dodging past the whip to crawl into a badger earth). Time, just over two hours. Among others up at, or soon after, the finish, there were, I understand, Count Larische, Mrs.

Cross, Miss Hargreaves, Miss Judkins, Mrs. Jones, Messrs. Asquith, Entwisle, Hanbury, sen., Crawley, Capt. Faber, and several more.

The Annual Meeting of the Pytchley Hunt took place on Tuesday last. "Mr. Langham resigned the Mastership, after having hunted the country for twelve seasons—a longer period than any Master has kept it during this century. A cordial vote of thanks was given him, and Lord Spencer agreed to take the country again."

The vote of thanks is indeed one which all who hunt with the Pytchley very heartily endorse. Great and consistent sport has signalised Mr. Langham's many seasons of Mastership. He has raised the pack to a very high standard; and he has maintained an excellent feeling among the farmers, landowners, and the Hunt generally. The debt of gratitude we owe him is a great one.

Sadly I dip my pen once more to touch on the sudden removal of another old comrade to still happier hunting grounds. Shocking to us—melancholy indeed for the hundreds who knew him and cared for him—but not sad, surely not sad, for *him*. Far be it from me to write flippantly, or think carelessly, of the death of a friend so valued, so consistent and so true—the most kindly even-hearted gentleman that ever wore Her Majesty's uniform, sported silk, or rode to hounds conscientiously and for love of hunting. But a man's end must come, and had better come thus quickly and unawares in the midst of happiest surroundings—mind and body still capable—than in a gloomy sickroom, a burden to himself and of no value to others. When he has had his innings, when in a fair measure "the fruit has been gathered, the tale been told," he may well be content to make room for younger plants, rather than exist on until he cumpers the ground, a withered and barren trunk. And well indeed for him if he can leave such memory behind him, so many friends to regret and think lovingly of him—so few, nay, never an one I should imagine

to think hardly of him—as Captain Barclay. The deepest sympathy, from all who knew them both, is for the brother, who has lost the companion of his life.

BEDRIDDEN.

BETTER than boardship, anyhow! Green turf is fairer than green water; and the point of view of a tressel bed is at least not much worse than that of a deck chair. A flock of starlings—covering the grass to the very window sill—is of far more interest than a bevy of Mother Carey's chickens on the dizzy waters; and a couple of foxhound puppies are more laughable in their frolic than any school of dolphins in the Atlantic. Nature and her history are almost of necessity the study of every countryman's life. But, it happens, there is beauty of pencilling and nervous grace of movement among these birds as they work a grass field after a shower, that needs an opportunity of close and leisurely observance. They hurry over their food as eagerly as hounds at the trough, or cowboys at their midday meal. And so closely do they tread the sod, no wonder huntsmen expect a check from their foiling presence as readily as from the rush of a flock of sheep. Their bright eyes, at such close quarters, may be seen to twinkle with rapacity as they snatch the worms risen to the morning shower; and the glossy spots of their mottled backs sparkle like black pearls. The puppies come racing by—the one with a helper's boot in her mouth, the other racing for a worry. And the starlings swirl up, to spread in skirmishing fashion, then wheel into line and resume position, with all the method of a drilled battalion. A few lazy rooks—reminding one of the idle mandarins who dawdle after a regiment of Chinamen soldiery only as passive spectators rather than as officers—flap lazily up on the outskirts of the brisker flock, as the puppies tear past, a Belvoir Governor with the boot and a Pytchley Solomon snatching alongside.

Suddenly the unsavoury plaything is dropped ; the ruling spirit, of many a generation's inheritance, asserts itself ; down go their noses together ; and a new pastime bids for their whole attention. The trail of a rabbit has crossed their course ; in a moment they stoop and swing and are away on the line. Bunny is not far off ; and soon is to be seen scuttling across the meadow—Warwickshire and Pytchley alike scoring loudly in his wake. "Have a'tat him, little bitches !" I'll ride to your tuneful voices yet, where the grass is gayest and the fences are fairest. Make the most of your holiday, my puppies. The kennel cart may be round for you any day now—and, believe me, the early stages of hound discipline are not one whit sweeter or gentler than a boy's first school-term (miserable memory).

Sauntering hither some half an hour later, their noses all plastered with sand—to tell the tale of their chase—the puppies fling themselves down, to bask and rest in the happy sunshine. They have long learned to take only a passive interest in the career of the colts, now being sent lustily over a chain of easy fences culminating at the lawn. So they trouble themselves not at all as two puffing grooms go by, for approval or correction, according to master's temper or progress. On the present occasion these latter are let off with a mild request for repetition—"both spurs in, and drop it on to his left shoulder as he rises if you can" (of course they can't—but a flourish may do something if it doesn't unseat them). And round they come again—both horsemen attaining the lawn well in advance of their saddles. "Capital, that will do. Don't come through the window." Better than boardship, did I say ? Ay, better by far than catching sharks from the sternwalk, or hooking albatross in the vessels foaming wake (the two most exciting phases I know of sport at sea)—a million times better than that ghastly game of "bull."

Ah ! what is it, Portly ? what puts your bristles up and your stern down ; and why throw your tongue in anger and fear ? Are my eyes playing me false ? or what sickbed phantasy is

here? Have you come to haunt me by day as you do by night? Nay. No spectral huntsman! no visionary hounds; are these. Solid, ruddy, friendly, and true is that lusty form on the sturdy grey: very lifelike, practical, and entrancing is the lithe little pack at his heels. On their way to the Gorse, are they! And if that way is a hundred yards round you've at least made me grateful for life. Dim and blurred as in a dream the mass of colour and movement that follows. The sun is strong and dazzling. Man is but weak, and weaker when ailing. "I was afraid it might be too much for you," came the kindly word next day. "Too much!" how can there be "too much" of fellowkindness, in a world that is rough as a coral strand?

The little side fences prove an attraction to a few, and a welcome diversion to me, the onlooker. In place of threading their way through the gate, half a dozen considerate spirits fly the plashed hedge beside it; and as these are headed by the tip topmost of stud grooms, by an ex-master of hounds, and by a practised farmer, you may take it for granted that this part of the exhibition is practically faultless. Not altogether the same is it with the after performers. Some horses decline to lark: some men don't care about larking. But—if I may say so without seeming ungrateful—it were better that the man should express his own feelings first, not wait to acknowledge them till the horse has declared his.

HACK-HUNTING.

NOT even Melton can approach such qualification as we have here for this week. Six packs for the six days, never a meet beyond a dozen miles; hunting to be had within six miles every day but one, and all on the very best of grass! For *mens sana* I care not. For *corpus sanum* and six safe conveyances I would give, well, more than I possess. Such a programme will not come again this season.

I saw hounds on Saturday—and this too at the very city gates—saw them kill one fox, and hunt another. But the one failed to get out of the wood; and the other, after giving them fast fun for seven minutes, either took to the railway or turned to the canal towing path. So there needed little physical power to see all this—to see it sufficiently, at all events for the fulfilment of the ordinarily accepted definition of vision (not too literally), as it is construed for the doings of hounds.

A great game is foxhunting—a very wide and various game happily—of which the looker-on may see much but not the pith, not the kernel, none of the heart and life of it.

Alas, there is none of this in the background—any more than there is in fielding long slip at cricket, or in guarding the baggage when the corps is to the front. That there are other gratifying, genial, pleasures here to be found is not to be denied. Besides, does it not “bring people together who would not otherwise meet, and do much towards improving our unrivalled breed of horses, my lord?” In such position you may at all events run and read, look and learn, mark and digest. Yet for the life of me I cannot, even after an hour’s ride home and a full hour’s evening smoke, understand why, when a fox breaks in full view in one direction, viz. to the immediate front, the mass of people should break up and hie away in at least five separate different directions—only a very small proportion going for the hounds, the rest apparently speculating upon the fox’s intentions as they might (with more legitimate excuse?) with stag. The fox’s intentions were as usual directed mainly by the prompting he chanced to meet on his way. And, it is almost needless to add, four-fifths of the starters, quite contentedly, never saw a hound again until the check. Yet, there is a marvellous knack in getting over a country thus in the dark. I can generally follow a tail-hound—especially if there be fifty fellows riding at him, ahead of him, and over him, all the while. But to steer without a beacon,—going as fast the while as the thrusters in front, who turn not aside, even to catch their neighbour’s horse—and in so steering, to hit off un-

hesitatingly a line of gates or a chain of gaps, is a truly wonderful instinct—a talent beyond compare. And the next great desideratum, a quality even more enviable still, is—not to care two pence what the hounds are all this time doing. These are the gifts to lighten a fox hunter's old age. Let him acquire them at any price—or as Cavendish quotes of Talleyrand on another hobby, “Pauvre jeune homme, quelle triste vieillesse vous vous préparez !”

But you men and women who ride in the van—you little know what we see, and how we chuckle, who ride behind. The comedy of a summersault over timber, the absurdity of White-leathers' legging-it up the meadow after his horse—the romance of beauty awaiting the return of cavalier, or of his rival, with her hunter, while skirts that are all too patent pin her to a standing posture—all these, and many other things, you see nothing of, in your mad career—“your eye upon hounds,” forsooth ! Come with me, see the run, as others are content to see it—“D—— the hounds !” and remember this is Bromley Davenport's say, not mine (As a lord may wear shabby clothes—so can a great writer take license that a humbler daren't). Talk to me no more of riding. Slow hunting, say I. Bow-wow-wow. That's what a sportsman loves. So they have told me from my youth up. And I never believed it till now.

I left off hunting as it seemed in mid-winter—yet only five weeks ago. Now I crawl out to find it almost summer. Then hounds were whipped off at 4.30. Now they may hunt on till dinner-time, or exhaustion—though, with the ground almost as dry as a *maidan* (save that the snow showers have gently damped the surface) it is difficult to see how exhaustion can ensue to horse or hound or fox—which in some degree accounts for the great points recently made. February, indeed, is the month that raises the blinds, turns winter into spring, sets all things multiplying (this is a theory, though, that with instance and exception is altogether too wide to follow out here, and I am thinking of lambs, lame horses, and I don't know how many more things), and if only free from broken weather is invariably

(as far as my brief experience goes) the best month of the year for real sport. The country, too, is easier to get over now, gentlemen, than it was in November—is it not?

Monday morning broke with warm rain splashing against the window-panes—with March put back a peg or two—and fox-hunting set on its legs for the remainder of the season. The Grafton met at Farthingstone; and, though they had not, like some of their neighbours, advertised for noon, Lord Penrhyn gave nearly the same indulgence. When March is once in, I doubt if any single member of a field is at the rendezvous punctual to time—if that time be earlier than midday. Monday was a refreshing day on which to find oneself hunting (possibly I may speak with some little bias on this score—being at length released from the kindly thralldom of mere hearsay. There are times when a man may heartily thank God for pure fresh air and for the happiness of being—and never more heartily than when existence is found in the presence of hounds and in the pleasures of the hunting-field.) Of the sport—well, the usual Monday run had not come off while I was there to see, or to suppose it from a distance.

It was different on Tuesday, with regard to the size of the field—the North Warwickshire at Dunchurch, on a breezy spring morning. Mr. Ashton found himself in command of a perfect *corps d'armée*—gathered from far and near and every side. By the way—whether it is because the great body conservative of English foxhunters have been so nauseated by all that is Irish, except horses, or for some reason yet unexplained, the custom of “capping” at the meet has never taken hold in this country—even where it would be most applicable. And if the question be not impertinent—where could a more suitable meet be found than at Dunchurch—an instance of a most popular fixture near the junction points of several Hunts. (This is no exaggeration—for to my own knowledge there were good sportsmen present, who had *ridden from home*, and from no less than *seven* different countries.) The bulk of the field indeed was made up of others than North Warwickshire men:

and each and all of these (not already being contributors) would, I undertake to say, most gladly have put a sovereign or at least half a sovereign apiece into the cap, had it been held out to them. They would thus have been afforded a grateful opportunity of making some return for the rails they might break or the hedges they might knock down. The proceeds of two or three such meets would suffice to pay the whole damage and poultry cost of the Rugby side.

If sport is a lottery—it is never more so than in the month of March. Tuesday began unluckily; for, with a leash of foxes at Bunkers' Hill, hounds got on to the vixen, while the other two rovers took each a beautiful line across the valley—the one for Shuckburgh, the other for Braunston. But better fortune attended the draw of Causton. A good fox took some rousing; but, once clear of the covert, he never shirked the wind, but took them gaily into it for some three-quarters of an hour. His course was the heath of Dunsmoor (at least I suppose it was a heath, till, finding that corn could be grown at a profit even there, the wise men of their time cut great deep ditches across it and ploughed the land thus drained). This upland plain forms of course the most striking contrast possible to the green level vale to the south of Dunchurch. But there is much sport to be seen over it for all that—as to-day furnished by no means a bad example. Hounds ran but slowly for the first two or three miles I was told—though, being myself in company with the steadier second horsemen, and a good many others steadier still (“Oh no, we never mention” them), I imagined they were going fast. What a fund of imagination is the proud property of those who ride behind! So they went on to a little covert dignifying itself with the “high-toned” title of Fulham Wood, where a shepherd dog—so they say again—chased the fox and turned him leftward to the breeze—and to us. By this time I had endorsed the conclusion I have come to long ago, viz., that I should make the worst second-horseman in England—for the farther I follow at a pace that I am weak enough to believe my own much-abused varlet adopts

as his own, the farther I invariably fall behind, till at last it seems as if the world held nothing but me and my horse—oh yes, and always one other twain (much more hopeful and beaming). But never mind. Tired of giving reign to my fancy as to what might be going on where a hundred pair of shoulders were shrugging, and all seemed brisk and easy, as they danced to the music that led them—I kicked in the one spur that misfortune has left me, struck a line of gates, flustered through hole and gap, and flung forward with an energy and success that would have done credit to Mr. Jorrocks or a butcher boy. So I saw hounds enter Frankton Wood, pulled out my watch, and mopped my forehead with the best of them. Five-and-thirty minutes I marked it down—then heard with some misgiving (I am bound to confess) the holloa forward and away, and realised that the run was not yet over. They drove on a mile or two to Frankton Village ; then, turning down the wind, could move only slowly to Baughton—near which village their fox beat them, at the end of about an hour from the find.

THE ROAD.

A FIRST STAGE BY SEA.

IF you would enjoy a trip by road—I don't mean with tandem or with the high-flight coach, but with the humble cart or phaeton—you want no groom stuck by your side or perched behind. You should “run the whole outfit” yourself; be, in fact, “the cook and the captain bold and the mate of the Nancy Bell,” and be prepared to look after things yourself. To do this you must start, of course, by being a practical stableman. Further, you must keep your temper (is there any position in life wherein that difficult feat is not desirable?), carry the principle of *suaviter in modo* to a degree nearly approaching systematic blarney, and that of *fortiter in re* to a pitch that includes the insisting that every pig-headed, half-drunk, or wholly inefficient ostler shall carry out to the letter your orders as to grooming, feeding, and watering. It is a meek, or, at least, well-controlled, spirit that can put up with each one of these gentry in turn treating as wanton impertinence your intrusion into the mysteries of horse treatment. Horse-skimping would be a better term for the neglect that, at their experienced and unprincipled hands, attains almost to a fine art. To fly out is often justifiable, is occasionally even advisable; in fact, if a careful horse-owner did not “loose off” now and then, I can see no alternative but that he must burst or give up his self-imposed task altogether. Standing over these gentlemen while they grudgingly perform as much of their duties as they are obliged I take to be the chief drawback of a road trip. It would be far easier, far more agreeable, and, probably, no less

effective, to strip to the shirt and do the job yourself, although such a proceeding might hardly be deemed compatible with dignity—the cheap peg on which hang position and esteem. Yet it does one good occasionally to break the ice, to dip below the level we deem our own, to be rubbed the wrong way by the coarser forms of life—and to thank God afterward that England still retains some little class distinction. Strangest of all, you never realise the existence of this so fully as when ruffianism pulls itself up short on the verge of insult, and turns away from a border-line that in many countries it is held excellent to breach.

Now I will take you at a plunge to a lowest experience of *compagnons de voyage* and road travel.

A first stage from the Isle of Wight Londonwards brings in a sea transit—Ryde to Portsmouth.

There are some big hotels at Ryde, as is in keeping with autumnal and annual influx of visitors. But these visitors come to boat, to pier-parade, to look through one-eyed spy-glasses—anything, in fact, but a-horseback or in carriage. Ryde is marine. The flush of the sea-foam tints the Naiads who lend life and delight to sea-wave and shore; while the main ambition of the yachter by profession and by clo'—as distinct from the pukkah enthusiast, who, by the same token, is likely to haunt less ostensibly maritime centres—is to be brown, weather-eaten—the old tar, the merry salt. Horses are apart from the Isle, as regards extraneous intrusion. The Wight people need them for their own use—to work the excursion drag in summer, and to hunt the fox in winter; for the Island is by no means without hounds, and but for its railways would be a snug little country. But that has nothing to do with you or with my instance.

The Isle of Wight evidently prefers to depend upon her own resources. She wants no traffic with the adjacent little island of Britain, and she certainly expects no autumn visitor to come armed with a horse and trap, that of himself he may explore her inner beauties. So it comes about that an application for pas-

sage across from mainland to mainland of carriage and horse would seem to take her officials entirely by surprise, though it is but fair to add that they are quite above showing any signs of being startled or perturbed. They simply regard the suggestion as a trifle scarcely worthy of consideration. Cattle, sheep, and pigs are taken over twice a day, and that is all that anyone seems to know. The captain of the boat receives all moneys for conveyance of live stock, and the transaction, as far as other officials are concerned, may now be considered closed. Even the senile ostler who presides over the hotel stable knows nothing of such ventures, but apparently looks upon it in some such light as he would regard a voyage across the Atlantic in a sailing ship, as an unnecessary and unprofitable freak. However, he accepts charge of the casual horse, is much annoyed at being checked in the act of immediately administering a bucketful of ice-cold water, and is still more hurt when called upon to wisp her over outside instead of sweeping into her manger what dust he can dislodge from her ears and forehead with a coarse dandy-brush. When it comes to a question of feeding, he is bound to admit that the hay is too mouldy to be eaten, but proposes to give her some chaff cut from the same material, on the principle of Punch's bachelor housekeeper, who, being informed there was no bread in the house, cheerfully ordered toast as a substitute. Inquiries from rail and steamboat officials, as well as from ostlers, being obviously of no avail, there was nothing for it but to go for the "man-in-the-street."

The latter came to the rescue, and, under promise of beer, pointed out what was known as "the Slip"—a vague and meaningless term that we had already heard, but without the slightest explanation or hint as to what influence the article in question was to have upon our fortunes. "The Slip" turned out to be a sloping causeway leading on to the sandy beach—or possibly, at high water, into the sea—though what its title to the name of Slip might be, except that it was a little bit greasy with seaweed, I failed to discover. At any rate, as the result of two hours' search, we made out that this was to be the

starting-point ; and, better luck still, the ancient mariner chewing his quid was "the captain" of the ferry, the Charon, into whose charge we and our fellow passengers were about to commit ourselves. And who were our fellow passengers—already on the spot, awaiting their turn, he told us, since morning ? A score of black porkers, two calves, a yearling heifer, and, lowest of all—not even redeemed by unintelligibility of utterance—a couple of pig-drovers. "No use to come yet," explained Charon, though it was already half an hour after supposed hour of sailing—two o'clock. "All this lot's to be got in yet, and they haven't swilled the boat down after landing them sheep. Bring yer veicle in half an hour. My chaps 'll help ye aboard. So in the hot summer sun we drove round Ryde's already half-deserted precincts, for were not the island regattas all completed, and Society accordingly out of serge for the year. The Canoe Pond remained, but its company was at low tide. Only an odd craft or two broke its surface, and the Esplanade was given over to a few nursemaids in charge of encumbrances requiring more sea air while their mothers needed change elsewhere.

Returning to the Slip, we were now made aware of what was before us. The sea was fully a quarter of a mile out, with a stretch of wet sand thickly strewn with seaweed leading to it, while some fifty yards within the shallow water lay the flat-bottomed barge which was to be our transport. The porkers were already half-way to the water's edge. Their drovers, stripped of boots and stockings, and with trousers rolled up, followed after them with uncouth noises and muttered blasphemy. They were yet to make it loudly apparent that even a western mule-driver, in his most exasperated moments, would not, on their own ground, be "in the same street" with them. Indeed, I question if either mule-driver or cowboy (well-broken and untiring as the latter is in the trying ordeal of "rustling ca'ves") would have gone through with the job they now encountered. And yet everything began so glibly. The astonished swine, hustled suddenly into the water, found them-

selves half blinded by the spray they thus created, and, rushing forward into the sea, with none of the advantages of a steep place to tilt them over, found themselves face to face with the floating platform at the boatside. Gladly they scrambled into the dry sty awaiting them. All but one. He was a pig of independent spirit. He would have been an agitator, but that he had missed his opportunity, and his followers were now safely confined to barracks. But he was still a wild, irresponsible rover, pork O'Brien, bent upon opposing to the utmost the tyrants armed with authority; and, if he could not fight in concert, he would fight alone. So with snort and squeal he headed for land, dived between the legs of his nearest oppressor, the latter, instinctively closing his legs to field him as he would a cricket ball, being tumbled flat into the briny. Foam and fury flew heavenward; the other drover in no way mending matters by laughing uproariously, while the little pig trotted off for the landing-stage, grunting complacently as he went.



But the fun was not nearly finished. He was soon overtaken, but it was quite a different thing from getting him near the boat again. For an hour he dodged his pursuers up and down the beach, slipping round and between them even as they

headed him for the barge, and scorning their attempts to hold his slender curly tail. Piggy, being neither a beer-drinker nor a smoker of black cavendish, was in excellent wind. It was otherwise with his assailants, who, moreover, lavished all their spare breath in unbridled anathema. At length he had them done to a turn, and might, I imagine, have sauntered back to the island without further hindrance on their part, but that help came from an unexpected quarter. The O'Brien was pounced upon by a new and irresistible foe. The shepherd, who had recently crossed with his sheep and his dog, and had since watched the contest with close interest, could stand it no longer. Suddenly he, too, took action. Jumping from his seat he ejaculated, "Let's see what my old dog 'll do!" and ran down to the combatants. In a moment the scene was changed. The wave of his hand acted like the stick in the nursery fable of the old woman, her pig, and the stile. The collie went for the pig, and pinned him fast by the ear, in spite of his squeals and contortions. The drovers and their new ally were thus able to seize piggy by the heels, and, carrying him in some such fashion as the police adopt towards a fighting drunkard, to bear him helpless into the barge.

Meantime the afternoon was waning, and we were no farther forward in our journey than at midday. But now the ancient mariner turned his head, and gave permission for our watery pilgrimage to begin. That a spirited, shore-going horse would thus readily consent to take the water, was a matter we had long ago made up our minds to discredit. But there was nothing for it but to try or else to sell the whole turn-out where it stood, to be applied hereafter to purposes of island excursion and suchlike. The old salt declared, in tones and words of such honeyed politeness, that a suggestion of largesse fairly stuck to them, "Bless you, sir, if it hadn't 'a been for them blamed pigs you might ha' been aboard ever so long by now!" "Them blamed pigs" were doomed to be the scape-goats of our voyage. When anything went wrong, it was "them blamed pigs." Even when they lay quiet, they curled themselves one atop of another in a solid mass, whose weight pressed

the fore-end of the boat into the sand, and prevented her floating for an hour later in the rising tide. So we should have been little better off had we been already enjoying their society in the barge. Now we found a friend in the driver of a Chaplin and Co.'s goods-truck, who, volunteering the observation that perhaps our horse would not like the water, offered us a lead, as he was bound for a load from a cargo-boat lying half recumbent in the low tide. (Never did I welcome lead at strong timber or blind ditch more gladly than this kindly help.)

Our trapper followed the cart cheerfully, snorting only now and again at the patches of seaweed, and giving a single wild plunge when she felt the first wavelet ripple round her fetlocks. It was at the moment that he turned us, as it were, adrift, by shooting on beside our barge, that a sense of danger and insecurity really fell. "When in doubt, play trumps." Down went the unaccustomed lash. With one spring the mare landed on the platform, and, wild at a second stinging cut, flung herself, and the trap after her, into the barge—to pull up, with nostrils expanded and forelegs extended, right among the pigs. For a moment there was a panorama. The pigs took the offensive, became a bristling, squealing mass of upturned snouts, then formed square, and elected to defend their own corner against the intruder. The calves on either quarter were much more aggressively troublesome. Finding they could not break their lanyards, to which they were tied, they went head down against the wheels, making the phaeton rattle from stem to stern and the whole bay resound with their bellowing. The mare soon recovered herself, submitted peaceably to being unhitched and stabled with the trap between her and the swine—and we thought the voyage was to begin. Not yet, by any means, "all along o' them blamed pigs" again. They weighted the boat down so obdurately that for an hour she could not raise her head, while we kept the stray swine from among the wheels, and the pig men smoked placidly, or jested according to their bent. A standing formula they passed continuously, and I leave it to your superior acumen to determine whether it was intended to be suggestive, or was merely a sarcastic lament on

the position of "water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink."

"'Ave a little drop, Bill, just to clear yer throat. Must be dry running arter that there —— pig."

"No, thank you, Jim; I don't care about it just now. I never drink at sea. Shouldn't mind some when I get's ashore!"

Perhaps they might have led up to something tangible, but that on any other topic they were quite unassailable and uncommunicative. Even on the subject of pigs they were reticent of information; on the matter of transport, probabilities of weather, and suchlike casual topics, they gave one no encouragement. So conversation never ripened, their mysterious suggestion was never inquired into, still less acted upon, and instead of the pig-drivers going ashore with drink in their pockets, a dignified and distant attitude was preserved between them and us, and we parted as strangers.

In its own good time the barge floated, a steam-launch took us in tow (one of the pig-drovers only just escaping tying himself in a half-hitch in the tow-rope), we made Portsmouth, and landed live-stock and wheels in good order.

THE NEW FOREST IN AUGUST.

ENGLAND is only a little country after all. To drive, therefore, from the Midlands to the south coast is but an easy three days' trip, is a little cheaper, perhaps, than going by rail, and is certainly less monotonous. To do it by train takes a whole day—and a very wearisome one. Besides, if time has to be killed, there are worse ways of doing it than by means of a driving trip. I am not about to trespass upon Mr. Black's province, with a new edition of *Adventures of a Phaeton*. But I may be allowed to commence with the fact that for reasons of which perhaps the chief was innate idleness, I compromised the first stage of the journey by sending forward Abraham, with horses and trap, a day before, and cutting in with him the next morning at Oxford.

Abraham, be it known, unites in his fatherly person the positions of second-horseman, valet, and occasionally of gardener. It is only fair to his caste to add, that in the last capacity he is an utter, though amiable, failure; in the middle capacity he is decidedly indifferent and brings much misery on himself and his master; while in the first-named he is—well—a mixed quantity—his virtues being admirable, his shortcomings only such as of necessity belong to the race of second horsemen and the grossly unfair requirements made upon them. That is to say, he doesn't drink beer by the wayside; he doesn't gallop my horses; and he certainly daren't jump them. On the other hand, he does not invariably arrive with his horse—the latter cool and unruffled, *sans dire*—at the end of a run, quite as soon as the first-flight men who have ridden neck-and-crop with hounds throughout; and he is not always in one's pocket

at the moment that one's inner man happens to suggest lunch or a drink. Added that Abraham positively enjoys being sworn at ; and that he is the father of seventeen children by the register—you know enough of him for all purposes of my little story.

I didn't see him start that morning, I rejoice to say : for the struggle took place while I was yet sleeping the sleep of the idle. But as he had one horse to lead that was very stubborn, and another to drive that was free, Abraham appears to have begun his journey by being almost torn in two and by as nearly as possible upsetting the whole outfit into a ditch. However, he reached Oxford all right ; and was to be seen there next morning very beaming, very important, and evidently delighted with the idea of throwing off for awhile the responsibilities of an overgrown family, that to my certain knowledge, by the way, he has never seen for years except in the dead of night and on occasional "Sundays off."

Before leaving the home stables it had been hinted that a "respectable appearance" would be required of him during the forthcoming trip ; so he had prepared himself for every occasion—how do you suppose ?—in lumbering the phaeton a yard high with extra clothing for himself and for his horses ! As he was to be away for at least a week, he had equipped himself with two stiff hats (in bandboxes) besides the billycock he wore as undress and the stable cap he carried in his pocket. And as it was the middle week of August he had elected to guard his horses against the cold by bringing along two thick fawn rugs apiece. Where my modest luggage was to be packed had formed no part of his calculations. Needless to say, a large bundle—the core of which was one of Abraham's hat-boxes—went back forthwith as "Returned clothing. Paid ;" and the phaeton (no—it was only a buckboard, by no means the worst, and certainly one of the lightest, of conveyances for a long country drive) looked a little less like a carrier's cart, and travelled all the easier.

Under these improved circumstances we moved pleasantly

and leisurely on, under the hot sunshine and over the corn-clad fields on which the Craven hunt. Now we were fairly on the Berkshire Downs, where wheat and turnips and soft felt sheepwalks mark their own boundaries, and fences have no place. For miles we travelled thus—the ruling passion e'en in summer asserting itself in contemplation and comment. The Quorn pack, as bought by Mr. Coupland, came from the Craven country—and could hunt. And heavens, what a school ground! No wonder they could put their noses down—even to leaving no stone unturned for a possible scent beneath it. I' faith, with all deference and respect to the keen sportsmen who make the best of circumstances, I would not eke out my remaining hunting years with the Craven—no, not even were my horses found, and the run of my teeth besides! Even its roads are gruesome; and the preparation for winter-metalling ghastly—here a heap of grim blanched lumps resembling nothing but skulls; here, in the next stage, the flint rocks split into pieces such as would have served the ancient Britons for hatchets and spearheads. With no slight gratulation I remembered that my trapper was shod with stout leather forming a flint-proof covering to her sole. Nowhere better than in the milestones was advertised the cutting-power of these razor-edged implements. Every letter and figure had been erased at the hands of stone-throwing urchins—and for all practical purposes, beyond assuring one that a mile is a mile, their use had departed.

Newbury came as a break: and a well-parked lower country as a change. Thus to Whitchurch—a tiny old-fashioned town through which runs the Test, the queen of trout-streams, and raved of by Charles Kingsley. Afterwards a wet, woful day's drive along the border line of the H H, the Hursley and the Hambledon; so to the New Forest.

A wholly different aspect does the Forest now wear to that in springtime—when last we saw the fallow buck hunted under the greenwood shade. Oak and beech, of course, are in heaviest foliage: but what strikes the eye more promptly is the depth

of green bracken and the new sufficiency of grass. The forest-ponies look almost fat, and their young offspring sleek and happy—little recking of the cruel wintertime ahead. The Deer-Hounds have summered well, and looked muscular and ready on this early byeday at the New Park—as well they need be, to fight their way through the choking mass of fern. How they could get through it at all, if a southerly wind were blowing and the sun of August had its proper power, is beyond conjecture—and fortunately matters not now, for to-day a cool sea-fog was drifting aloft and the air was more autumn than summerlike. Grass and heather were dripping with recent rainfall; and the ground was fit to trust almost anywhere—the turf rides of the inclosures sound but pliant, and open forest and the commons alike well watered and safe. The old natural—or apparently natural—woodland is the most fascinating part of the New Forest. The old timber is never thinned out for conversion into income; the Royal Navy no longer claims the best oaks; Nature has it all her own way; and accordingly the modern Briton may here find his only remaining native forest thrown open in its happiest form.

As I rode up, with customary unpunctuality, the scene by Brockenhurst (Rhinefield Walk, I fancy) was picturesque, almost mediæval, and just breaking into life. Groups of horse-men and ladies fair were scattered under the trees along its edge; the hounds were mustered in couples held by their attendants; the huntsman was galloping up, with horn at mouth and tufters at heel; while the woodlands opposite were ringing to lusty and repeated view holloas. A brace of buck (are they brace or couple?) were afoot, had left the bushes for the wood, the Master had given the office, and the pack was to be laid on at once. If hounds are eager and excited when blown out of covert to a fox away—when already they have been working at liberty, perhaps for hours—how much more trying to their keen temperament must it be to find themselves suddenly freed from leash with the certainty—as they know well—of the burning scent of a deer awaiting them! But they

flashed over it now—scarce a moment, then swung into the woodland of Poundhill after their quarry, and their deep notes at once rang gaily forth from the sea of fern into which they plunged. Good play, too, they made through it; and we had to gallop to keep within distance, by means of the green rides that came so frequently and so handily. Now and again we were glad to pull into a trot, where the ridings appeared to be little used and so less carefully tended; but on the whole it was goodly galloping—while to drink hound music once again was alone a revel. In twenty minutes we were warmed to the heartcore—when, as we pulled up at four cross rides, the buck suddenly rose from the stream where it cut the path some fifty yards in front. Glorious he looked with his broad-antlered front, as he halted and gazed—his red sides just heaving with the exercise and summer condition. Hounds were not a hundred yards away, and a few stragglers hurried promptly to the horn. But “chance and change ’tis folly to rue”—a little doe jumped up in their midst almost immediately; hounds changed to her; were subsequently stopped; and of sport and story there belonged nothing more to the day.

A GALLOP.

OBLIGINGLY that buck allows me to follow on—and to a climax. A veteran of some eleven seasons, it seems it had long been his custom to haunt the precincts of New Park. He had shifted responsibility on the Thursday, as told above. But Mr. Lovell had not done with him yet: and Monday was ordered for a second attack. My question directed to our respected oberjäger had been on the Thursday, “Will a fallow buck, like a fox, run straighter and readier next time for being hustled up?” “Probably,” said Mr. Lascelles: but, unfortunately, he was not there on Monday to see the probability fulfilled.

The meet was at the Lodge Gate, New Park, at the whole-

some hour of 11; and the morning alternated rapidly twixt sunshine and shower. It will be, as it were, but repeating an axiom to mention that I came up late. (May my worst enemy suffer *in perpetuo* what I have in minutes and moments when seeking hounds!) I can't help it. Trains never fit; horses don't come round to the door; and procrastination is inborn. Yet a kind providence seldom permits me to be altogether *too late*. This morning the road from Brockenhurst was thickly dotted with the autumnal visitors who with good judgment make the New Forest their resting place. There were many young couples. To these I ventured to address no such earth-born inquiry as related to the mere whereabouts of hounds. There were two or three artists with greenery canvas in hand. They did not look promising—"female of sex," and plain at that. Nurserymaids in abundance, and children in triplets. At last a bicyclist—desisting for a while from the merry pastime of whisking past horses' noses, and now harmlessly smoking his pipe, while his war cycle lay prone by the roadside. From him I gleaned that hounds had moved "straight up the Lyndhurst road twenty minutes ago"—and thither I hurried, oblivious of the fresh forest scenery, careless of tint of leaf or colour of flower, wondering vaguely how all these people could be aimlessly straying through the glades, when hounds were in their very neighbourhood. (The melancholy Jacques, in truth, was a merry jester as compared with a late-comer in his moments of misery.) Now over a gentle rise I came upon horsemen moving—some in one direction, some in another. I gathered, by frantic, hurried, questioning that the deer had been found and that the pack had been laid on! *Where* no one seemed exactly to know; but they galloped all the same. I and others, galloping all, went a complete circle at racing pace, round and within the Inclosure of Pondhead—to find at length in wondering gratitude that all the while we had been galloping round Master, huntsman, and hounds. It came out afterwards that the old buck had been harboured, and without delay roused in Pondhead, and that ten minutes later the pack

were upon his trail. He had lain down within the Inclosure—hence the momentary, friendly delay—and now they were away at his very heels.

Monday's sport, let me assert now, was altogether of a typical kind, complete in every detail—to wit, a splendid deer to begin with, a quick find, then a capital scent, a rideable country (grass and heather for hoofbeat), forty-eight minutes' hard galloping with only two trifling checks, and, to end with, a handsome kill in the open! How could you better it—as a sample of noble wild sport? And this, too, remember, in August—a month that in the south is held to belong to tiller, tarpaulin and serge, in the north to trigger and rod, while the riding-man may rust as he best can. Here's the prescription, and here the solvent—under which the rust will wear off and the joints move supple, by which the blood-current can be set going and the liver of sloth be roused! For 'tis *Forard Away* through the green-carpetted forest—fourteen couple, or thereabouts, driving hard under the hanging timber, plain to be seen, easy to be followed, through the thin undergrowth—but flinging their tongues the while only casually, for, if my scattered but repeated experience goes for anything, hounds seldom throw their voices very freely upon deer, whether carted or wild. The holly-bushes below, and the beech-boughs above were but slender hindrance through the old forest. Yet I thanked my stars earnestly, as we swung through Whistley Wood, that on this occasion my mount was within Galloway standard and was ready to be checked, twisted and turned as bush or bough demanded. And I thanked the forest authorities, too (the oberjäger above mentioned especially), from my very heart, that, where the woodcarts had left deep tracks and our forelegs pitched into what seemed nothing but quagmire, the saving faggots gave a foothold at bottom, and we went on our way without fall or overreach. The Charcoal-burners' camp was passed; and the great Inclosures drained by the Lymington River were ahead, when a bevy of boys and men, apparently on some bachelor picnic—possibly one of those plausible junketings solemnised under the name of reading-

parties—stood in the way, and headed our buck from his point. Major and Miss Talbot had, however, viewed him, as he turned leftward; not a moment was lost in regaining his line; and onward we scrambled through the mazy forest as fast as we could dart and zigzag. The Brockenhurst-and-Lyndhurst road was recrossed after skirting New Park; and the chase went on through Hollands Wood, the Lawn, and by the Victoria Tile Yard. The names are, I believe, correct; but in my own mind and memory there are stamped only a headlong career through gorse, heather, and holly; then a several minutes' dive through open woodland—the pack well together, and driving alongside an inclosure paling—then a turn into one of these big inclosures—Mr. Lovell, in spite of one arm, being quickest thither and quickest to swing the gate, before bringing his horn out to cheer on the stragglers and the field. Then a hurried mile or two by broad green rides, with a wealth of pinetree-jungle on either side, and then, outside, a minute's check, where a woodman had driven the buck back into covert, and the eager pack—running breast high—had overshot the mark. Allen was off his horse in a moment to clear the iron fencing. Hounds swung deftly back to him; and immediately a deep-toned note proclaimed that the line was *Forrard* once more. (All this in Stubby Copse.) Now the railway (L. & S. W.) was reached. A broad grass track lay between the high wire fencing and the adjoining wood; not a bridge opened a loophole beneath the line; and the buck, forced clean away from home and water, had nothing for it but to hold forward for life—or death. For a mile or so the leading couples raced hard along the rank turf—the tail hounds, momentarily slipped by the recent check, struggling hard to make up their ground to the Master's horn and Miss Lovell's cheer. "There he goes!"—the old glad signal that has prefaced death, and glory, to many a hundred reynard. And there, up the greenride was bobbing the white flag of the prize ahead. Through the topmost corner of Woodfidley he disappeared; and we cut the plantation-angle to issue upon Denny Bog and its wide vista of red heather and swamp. *Ye' tally ho!* Out he

bounces not ten yards away—his tongue lolling, his broad antlers laid back, and every spot on his dappled red jacket showing vividly in the sunlight. The leading hounds are almost at his quarters, and chase him in view down the moorland. Now he bends along the bogside ; now he meets the body of his pursuers ; now he turns to bay in the open, beats them off once, twice.



But the third time they pin and hold him—three couple on his quarters, as many more on his neck and shoulders—till the knife goes in, and the gallant old buck goes down upon the turf.

No such fun have I seen for many a month—and never a truer, cheerier sport. It was all over by one o'clock ; and the world shone bright for that day at least. These are the glimpses of sunlight that silver a clouded sky. Such are the touches of gladness that make life as a sparkling rill, rather than as a gloomy current in monotone.

It is difficult—nay not possible—for me, a stranger, to add who shared in the sport of Monday. But I know that, besides Mr. Lovell, Mrs. Francis, and the Misses Lovell, there were at least Major and Miss Talbot, Messrs. Arden, Bathurst, Heseltine, Matchem, Newman, Waldo, and perhaps a dozen more.

GRASS COUNTRIES.

SEASON 1890—91.

LATE AUTUMN.

A DAY'S hunting should be occupation sufficient for man or woman—for that day at least. But is it, when it begins soon after daylight and ends before luncheon—any more than dancing at a ball for four hours, with only a single check, is sufficient for the whole twenty-four? This is no argument against early-morning hunting—though frequently an excuse for shunning it, on the part more often of men who would do nothing all day if left to themselves. On the contrary, the same pleasant lassitude that the average Englishman—while as yet not included in the rollcall of Homburg nor arrived at a *régime* of Vichy and Apollinaris—naturally welcomes with his after-dinner coffee, is equally a comfortable sequence to cubhunting. It forms, indeed, a charming excuse for a lazy afternoon. Laziness when not a crime is a luxury. And the man is a poor thing who, feeling he cannot afford it, has not the energy to shake himself clear. No, in the matter of cubhunting disinclination is more often a matter of fashion. Were the pastime fashionable, fewer drawbacks would present themselves—and we should all go a-hunting in the early morn.

Thank goodness, it is not so ; and so those who care for the sport on its own account, see a great deal of fun without getting in each other's way. But the ground is as yet too sunbound to admit of complete enjoyment—though, with the glass now galloping downhill and the forecasts prophesying unutterable things, this Monday may prove to have been the last summer

morning of the year. Sunny and oppressive it was, after the night clouds had drifted off, and day had fairly asserted itself. The grooms of Rugby would seem, as is right, to be early birds. They were returning from exercise while the air was still cool, and we yet within doors! Strings of half-a-dozen, a dozen, and even fifteen horses, all still unclipped, trooped past the window—setting one to gape and to covet, when one ought to have been struggling to get into a boot or outside an untimely breakfast. They tell us good horses are scarce. There never was a time when so many men possessed them. And a vast proportion of these fortunate owners are, I am led to believe, quite ready to part, at a price.

The amateurs were hardly so prompt, to the call of daylight and duty. And to make it, in one sense, worse for themselves, through some misunderstanding they straggled into Bilton village about the time hounds (North Warwickshire to wit) were drawing the spinnies of Bilton Grange. Only, in one sense, though; for, if they did miss a twenty minutes' gallop, and gnashed their teeth loudly in consequence, at least they avoided the risk of using-up a hunter just carefully summered. The ground was noisy, even under the long grass. To gallop was sinful; to jump was extravagantly reckless—except, of course, under the impulse of duty, so-much-a-week, and horses-found-for-you, none of which grateful incentives come my way or probably yours. There were men out—or groping their way to hounds through neighbouring parishes—on old hunters with renovated legs, and on young hunters with brand-new understandings. But for neither order was the ground befitting—though some galloped and a few jumped, and the late arrivals were sore at heart. By the side of Rains brook is one of Mr. Parnell's little osier-beds; and here three or four of the Cook's Gorse foxes (some fifteen to twenty in all by last week's count!) had laid up together. Brightly they "lolloped" forth over the dewy greensward—a verdant carpet spreading almost unbroken to distant Shuckburgh and lofty Staverton, the arena of many a brilliant run and many an exciting struggle. Like

the fling of a thoroughbred horse is the loose easy bound of a fox at half-speed. There is a latent, idle, power in his leisurely stride that tells of resources kept in reserve, and bids us remember what he can do when the pinch shall come—when the scent shall be breast high, and the goal forty minutes away. To the third *débutant* the master sounded his horn; and some twenty couple of the bigger ladies of Kenilworth were sent to the front. Gladly they took to the task; and now we had to realize that they—and we—were hunting the fox. For my part, I realised it very quickly, and realised, moreover, that this was Warwickshire—not Hampshire, where last my hunting lines were cast. For there was no way out of the second field. With discretion almost akin to wisdom—or at any rate first cousin to parsimony or cowardice—I had already sent horses home and betaken myself to a pony. Else had my craven heart lacked the moral pluck (excellent term that for “craning”) to stand aside, when the huntsman galloped up to the low strong timber, and went on. So we rode round by the nearest gate, and the next, and many more—striking hounds again as they crossed the Hillmorton Road by Bilton Grange and betook themselves over the country to Bilton Village. Incident in plenty was there by the way; as there always is, could one but catch up and *réchauffer* it in appetising form. How we cheered a thirteen-hand pony as, hampered with no accoutrement but his own shaggy wool, he took a fifteen-hand gate in his stride—how we took liberties with a padlocked gate, and craved permission (with inclosure) by the evening’s post; how we watched with keen delight the old Fitzwilliam and Belvoir bitches cast for themselves beyond a dusty fallow—how we spurred bloodred to reach a turnip-field across a Dunsmore ditch—all these were part and parcel of a pleasant scamper, and helped to mark the minutes of glow and jollity. And the cub beat us when we reached Bilton Grange again, though he had found earths closed in his face as he travelled round. He will be a good fox yet. Blood enough was then found, in a brace of young foxes from the turnip fields.

We have found a new use for the whistler's throat-pipe—the tube with which Mr. Jones of Leicester enabled a roarer to breathe freely. At the present moment many an old favourite, who might long ago have been consigned to the kennels, is still carrying his master over the Shires, and remaining a useful member of the stable—though blowing a clarion-note through the metal pipe in his larynx. But the new application thereof is so simple and apparently effective, it would be the height of selfishness to limit its adoption to the one person yet benefited. The proprietor, then, of one of these mocking-bird quadrupeds went into a certain farmhouse to refresh—the occasion being this morning when hounds had turned homeward, and the host, being landlord, had a private and sufficiently-stocked cupboard on the premises. The rider, his duty done, issued to remount. The ploughman held the tubular one by the head, but succeeded in backing him into a barrow. Whereupon Mr. Foreman—the best of good fellows and as fond of fox-hunting as Tom Moody himself—hastened to the rescue. But old Blowhard wouldn't stand still—not a bit of it—though Mr. Foreman spoke soothingly and Proprietor roared impatiently. With Foreman as pivot, Blowhard went round and round, and Proprietor danced wrathfully after. The situation was perplexing, and threatened to be prolonged until lunch time—till a sudden and happy thought struck into the idle brain of one alongside, and took root. “Look at his neck beneath the jaw,” quoth he to the perspiring Foreman. “Don't you see the metal mouthpiece? Whistle into it!” There was no gainsaying the staid suggestion. Foreman glanced upwards but could catch no suspicion of a smile—so gravely he rounded his lips and whistled softly down the tube. “Now's your time! Whistle louder!”—as the would-be rider made another fruitless shot at his stirrup. Louder he whistled—fairly taking old Blowhard by storm, and forcing him to stand still for very astonishment. Up jumped the pleased proprietor—and all ye who happen to have a fractious favourite with a perforated throat are welcome to the wrinkle thus given.

A FIRST RAINY DAY.

NEVER—even after a frost—did I welcome a wetting so heartily as on Tuesday last. The soft cool drops fell not only on a thirsty land but on a glad spirit (mine only as sample of many). The Master beamed ; the hunt-servants looked entranced—even the breakfastless amateurs shivered contentedly, and made believe to smile. For the steady downpour meant salvation, release, a new era. Fox-hunting, hitherto in a dry dock, was to be launched on the waters. The transition was rapid, but had its stages, even after the gathering of the clouds for days past, the rumours of rain in north and south, and the prophesied “depressions”—whether of atmosphere or of liver (the most sensitive of all barometers) the oracles forbore to explain. We started for covert with the dust flying, and for an hour gazed wonderingly at the black scud streaking the heavens. A quarter of an hour later we were gratefully drenched to the skin ; then the ground became so slippery that horses could scarcely keep their feet ; and before we turned homewards the turf was apparently in fair riding order—or at least the surface-jar was gone, and the rattle had ceased. How little impression had really been made, it was easy to judge when one rode out for exercise next morning in the sunshine.

The North Warwickshire were again on their Dunchurch side, for a first visit to Wilcox's Gorse. Foxes were in profusion. So they had little difficulty in getting hold of a cub in the gorse, and another in Line's Spinney.

And then we had a little hunt. Another fox bethought himself that the North Warwickshire country was worth clinging to, even in preference to the Atherstone Woods of Coombe and All-Oaks that bade him come over the waters of Avon. He chose to climb the railway embankment to work inland ; though, as with the Thames of to-day at Richmond, he might almost have crossed the river-bed dry-padded. Now, I must tell you, anything rather than wild adventure of riding was in

the minds of the drenched and dawdling crew (if they will forgive the alliterative epithets), who sauntered after hounds. But somebody jumped a jump—always an infectious, foolhardy, proceeding, when it is just as easy, and twice as safe, to “go round”? Then another did ditto, and another and another. And all had a lot to say on the subject, as soon as they issued scatheless. Who would have thought it—“My old crock . . .” “My new four-year old . . .” and so forth. You all know the style in which we bound through the paper hoops of our first fence of the year. They were all off the spring-board together. And the next thing the Mutual-Admiration-Society found themselves opposed to was the L. & N. W. Railway. Under ordinary circumstances this should have been a stopper—to progress, if not to discussion. But the first shower, and the first jump, of a season don’t come every day. Here was a little “cock-hedge” (inverted commas to convey Leicestershire parlance), such as no new-fangled line would venture to depend upon. (I am told the Metropolitan Extension, that has its fangs already at the throat of Warwickshire, meditates nothing less than treble strands of best barbed.) How could the adventurers help themselves? They hopped in for very exhilaration, scarcely giving a thought, till it was too late, to the awful problem of how to get out—the latter being invariably the crucial, bitter, trial in crossing railway or river. They swarmed up the embankment, and surmounted the glistening rails. But on the farther brink the telegraph wires were hanging at pony height above the ground. It was necessary for riders to raise the lowest strands that they might pass under, while descending at an angle of 45°. One, two, and three of the party effected this unharmed: for at that hour in the morning the telegraph offices are scarcely in full play, and the chance of executing a stray foxhunter by the new process was fortunately missed.

But Number Four in rotation was protected from the risk by man’s best friend, his horse. The latter, fearless no doubt of timber or thorn—and certainly of such a mild barrier as displayed in the second little leafy hedge below—would have

nothing to do with dipping under dangerous electric wires. Spur and whip he didn't mind—but no Harness batteries for him! So he shifted all further responsibility—on to his rider—in whom henceforth the whole interest centred. Not even

the Iron Duke himself, on his original pedestal, ever held a prouder or more prominent position than did the hero in question. Like him, he affected, for a while, a nonchalant pose—as if the scene beneath him were not worth joining. Those below were whipping hounds off, to give colour to his rôle. Observed and observer had changed parts. The Observed thought to retire at the back of the stage; but the noble animal that so determinedly befriended him declined that mode of descent also. *Vestigia nulla retrorsum* was his motto; and *Medio tutissimus ibis* his parable, which he proceeded to illustrate by suggesting a trip up the railway, quite content that his Master should have full command within those limits. Accordingly Observer set forth for Coventry. But no outlet appeared in that direction: and it suddenly struck him

that the up express was about due. So, fleeing from that, he set spurs Londonway and held the embankment at speed as it flashed across him that the Birmingham mail would leave Rugby within the hour. Had it been in November, the predicament would not have been so grave—for at least he would have been wearing his own danger-flag, in a coat as yet in Mr. Walding's hands. But in a wet shooting-jacket there was no hope. Not a moment was to be lost. And so thinking (we suppose) he clapped spurs to his too-intelligent beast, and went hard for Rugby Station—"thence to box himself home," explained the chief wag among the spectators. The kind Unknown must extend his indulgence yet farther, and forgive my having thus retailed Tuesday's only mirthful incident by flood and field.

Only on Tuesday, October 21st, did Northamptonshire begin in any degree to accommodate itself to the requirements of fox-hunting. A ride forth that afternoon brought the comforting assurance that the turf was no longer wholly a green rock bed. The drizzle of overnight, following upon the day's rain of a week ago, found a greeting in the yielding ground, and every raindrop told—while the russet and gold of a lingering autumn lightened the scene. In fact, it looked, and felt, far more like hunting than it has yet been this fall. No alternative but to hurry home, and order a box for the morrow. I confess to being averse, and unwont, to take train in the month of October. But we have had no hunting; life is very short; and a season is shorter still. What has it been hitherto? Walking about on a pony while a cub has been killed. (Even the foxes are backward this autumn of 1890.) And the interval days have been spent by hunting men (by which I mean the men who grudge every day that is lost and would rather see one fox handsomely killed than e'en "twice twenty cock pheasants") in mutual commiseration, in dawdling preparation, and in fitful occupation such as best becomes a frost. That the season is approaching was evident in every corner of westward London last week. Men, whose line of life is unmistakably the chase,

dropped in upon the club from far regions as naturally as the early woodcocks speed southward with the first chilly breeze. From Oxford Street to Piccadilly was a skirmishing ground for healthy-looking manhood of a class quite different from that of the pallid townman. You could not turn in to your boot-maker's without stumbling across some old acquaintance on the verge of apoplexy—tugging and purpling to induce a quart of heather-grown calf to enclose itself in a pintpot boot; while the "Snob" smiled deprecatingly, assuring that the lasts were the same and that the "leg would soon fit the boot." Generally it ended in cramp, a howl on the patient's part, and a volley that rattled every shoe on the shelf. Or had you occasion to look in at your tailor's. It was a hundred to one there was Smith, with whom, three nights out of four the winter through, you ride back from hunting, now perched on a wooden horse, and sampling a swallowtail scarlet. Painfully aware was he that the Bond Street trousers were scarcely in keeping—indeed were supremely ridiculous in the multiplied mirrors around him. And he grew as red in the light as if caught in the dark—and felt bound to explain, that, well, he had thought he would try a new shape. The breeches-maker's place of business was a reproduction of the bootmaker's,—only more so, for they are merciless hands that wield the buttonhook. He, too, means to make the man. Altogether, the dandy of the hunting-field has, I imagine, about as good a time as a maiden being fitted for the summer season—and has, moreover, to pay his own bills into the bargain. Verily, there is vanity in foxhunting—and vanity let there be. 'Tis half the show. We don't all go out to slaughter the fox, nothing else. Who would go hunting if all were morose, and all were in sackcloth—with their sins and their souls on the sleeve of their coat of misery?

Northamptonshire is just pecking its way through its shell, next week to emerge in full life and smartest appearance.

Only within the past few days has it made its existence in any degree actively evident. It was not until then that men had given thought to jumping a fence or riding a gallop; but, if they visited the covert-side at all, it was for little else but to lounge, while, by hook or by crook, some cub-flesh was served forth to the young entry. For themselves—if from day to day they practised with fair impunity over the open ditches obligingly laid out for them in every thoroughfare of London W. by the Electric Light Companies—they felt they had availed themselves of all the opportunity offered. (Some of the younger members of the fraternity, indeed, had gone a step further, and seized upon the indulgence as a nightly means of qualifying for Melton's annual moonlight steeplechase.)

A capital scent marked the final week of October, and put life into it—as you would have allowed had you, like me, from the comfortable security of a gateway, to-day watched twenty men and women abreast skim a drop fence into a furrow. Honour bright, it was like nothing less than the patter of the drums at tattoo—or hailstones dropping on the roof of an Aldershot hut.

On Monday the Grafton had a "small-and-early" at Stowe Wood, and so succeeded in catching the rime in full bloom. It was indeed a wintry morning, such as should have no place before our horses have begun to screw up, before even our jackets are shed or our hair calls for cutting. Two or three mornings such as these, and a frozen-out foxhunter will become a thing of October—a *lusus naturæ* as startling as a white bear in Piccadilly. Somewhere about ten o'clock (they had begun an hour earlier than that) hounds were to be seen glancing under the morning sun, as they feathered from field to field 'twixt Stowe and Weedon. It seemed but a stone-throw to reach them—on the part of a cloud of late-comers kept abed by the untimely cold. So these latter skirmished into the valley and sought to rejoin hounds on the Weedon heights. But the gates didn't fit, or weren't open, and so the fun began. The impetus of the occasion was wholly insufficient: the state

of the ground was enough excuse ; and after a first few casualties they actually fell back from the hill they had essayed to breast, and returned to the wood, for a safer road round. But they had sustained a shock that autumn systems had not the vigour to bear. Even as the fall of Harold scattered their forefathers, so turned they and fled when disaster overtook their leader. He was a veteran of discretion, but was cruelly used by fate. Tragedy on occasion will merge into comedy. In this instance it fairly, and happily, gave way to it altogether. Harold found a breach in a blackthorn wall ; and, having found it, had a perfect right to do as he chose with it ; he accordingly climbed the breach on foot, while leading his charger after him and while an anxious band of followers awaited their turn and the completion of his daring feat.

Harold is not a big man, if a great one. He all but gained the top of the breach—when a treacherous *abatti* tripped him up, and forward he plunged into the ditch beyond. No thought had he for further glory ; no care for the brave band he captained ; no wish for the trustful charger hovering over his ready-made grave, save that the beast would not try to occupy it with him. But Harold was held by the heels. Both spurs were tangled in the reins ; the bay charger snorted with alarm, raised its head in terror ; and Harold was set in the position of one of Doré's fallen angels being cast down from Heaven. What his feelings were could only be guessed from the frantic play of his little legs in mid-air. They twiddled and shook with dazzling rapidity in their efforts to speak or their longing to be free. Surely such a topsy-turvy hornpipe never was figured before, certainly never one that called forth such rapturous applause. Great is Diana—but she was not in it with Terpsichore. The chase went on, but was clean forgot in shrieks of approving laughter till Harold's heels slipped out of their fastening, or the bay charger grew tired of fishing him, and breathless and blue-in-the-face bold Harold clambered back to his friends. Hounds meanwhile had nearly reached Everdon, the village in the next valley. Had we seen them no

more, 'twould have been Harold's fault only. But they had pulled up at a drain; and the few people who were with them had the satisfaction of watching the stragglers making their way downward. The green slope was greasy with frost: and a

mild hedge or two was unavoidable. But all the fire had died out of their hearts after Harold's disaster, and they crawled down the hillside in the dilatory unwilling fashion observable in connection with the first early fences of a young season.

In the brightest sunshine but chilliest wind hounds worked on over another valley, and the little brook, to Newnham Clump. How very small that streamlet is—and yet how viciously did half a dozen credited hunters decline it! They would not have it even at a stand, the hardness of the ground perhaps combining with the long delay of hounds upon the brink to institute, or to accentuate, their evil-minded aversion. With no thought of profanity, I ask, can you not at such times understand, and repeat heartily, Balaam's longing for a sword? And a six feet brook the only lion in the path! *Maddening.*

The little field got together on the brow ; hounds hunted up to another range of open earth ; and were then taken home. It only remains to bid their new huntsman, Smith, success and good fortune, and the talent to carry worthily the mantle of Frank Beers. Of the latter's retirement I have said my few words elsewhere ; and would fain be excused from again dwelling on the subject here. It is one on which I feel strongly and sadly. I will merely add that if ever huntsman carried into his retirement sincere sympathy and affectionate regard on the part of his field, it is so in the case of Frank Beers.

The return of warmth on Wednesday brought with it a phenomenally sudden fall of the leaf. The ash-trees were positively raining leaves ; oak and elm were divesting themselves more steadily but equally determinedly ; while the hedge-thorn was dropping its garments as fast as it could. From mouth to mouth one heard the expression pass, "The hedges will no longer be blind." But, I submit, there is no special subject for congratulation in that. On the contrary, when horses can once see through their fences they are only too apt occasionally to run through them, imagining them, especially under the prompting of pace or incomplete condition, weaker than they really are. Else why are steeplechase fences invariably thickened and blackened ? Leaves constitute no strength in a hedge ; but horses, except Irish novices who sometimes assume the erection to be a green bank, will generally rise well over them. The ditches on the other hand (it is no consolation to add) will be blind until Christmas—up to which period the crowd, more or less, is content to stay away. No, give me leafy hedges and clean ditches, if such a combination be possible. I see no advantage in leafless hedges except that they allow one a chance of seeing what is on the other side, a matter of more need nowadays than, well, when we were all younger.

And next week we begin, in the panoply of foxhunting and the absorption of a daily pursuit, nay, of a life's occupation, of

life's best elixir, of life's happiest distraction, of life's pith and kernel, say some. Contradict them according to your bent. Not for me is it to gainsay their words or scoff at their frenzy. Heart and soul, in precept and in practice, I am with them, until the good green turf shall be my coverlet, as it has oftentimes been my bed and my unfailing friend. Make the most of your opportunity mesdames et messieurs. But do not all patronise the same shop. Distribute your custom, or the goods will go up in price while declining in quality; and even the shopmen will hint that there are too many of you, averring they "have only enough to supply their home customers" (a principle that by no means expresses the spirit of foxhunting).

A WEEK WITH SIX PACKS.

IN the full swing of hunting at last—not even time to skim the morning paper. Sport day by day with one pack or another. You may, or may not, have been with the right one daily. But, taking your turn fairly, you must surely have shared in much that was cheery and pleasant, something that was exciting and satisfying. For my part, I have endeavoured to carry out a not altogether irksome duty, by hunting six consecutive (week) days with six different packs—within road distance and in, perhaps, the best country of each. Gratefully I tender my thanks to the six kindly Masters; and in all humility I offer my diary of the other five days.

Friday, Nov. 7, the Atherstone at Coton House, the roughest morning on which I have seen hounds take the field since the great gale of Oct. 9, somewhere early in the eighties. Horses would scarcely face it, with your road to covert lying up the wind; and it must have been pitiless work getting back to Atherstone against the storm. Yet both Mrs. and Miss Oakeley braved it—putting to shame many featherbed sportsmen living much closer to the scene. I grant that the early outlook was not tempting, if one's bedroom window faced the north-west, for the

rain drove against the panes like spray against a fo'castle port—shutting out from view even the dense black clouds drifting inland from the Atlantic. (Unconsciously one's thoughts recurred to that stormy pathway, and one's sympathies went forth to "those in peril on the sea.") But a wetting on dry land, if a paradox, is no great hardship, and as for being blown about, are there not living men—said to be sane withal—who keep private ships (at the cost of a pack of hounds, forsooth!) to ensure themselves that very luxury? * Not a nice day for hunting, doubtless. But what would you do at home?—knock off all your letters by one o'clock, eat an ill-earned and exaggerated luncheon afterwards, then, perhaps, smoke yourself silly, and lounge about grumbling—or not impossibly, swearing—at the weather, a prey to "undisciplined inaction," "and the frivolous work of polished idleness." A rough-and-tumble with the elements, in a tarpaulin kit—or something as much akin to it as civilisation will permit—is surely better than this?

Of course it was, by rights, a Shuckburgh hurricane, and should have come twenty-four hours earlier. But it happened to be late for the meet, and fell foul of the Atherstone. So yesterday the wholly unaccustomed spectacle was to be witnessed—of huntsman and field listening placidly on Shuckburgh Hill, while every hound note floated distinctly to the summit. And thus it was only last night that my after-dinner musing took the form of reflection upon the absolute advantages of foxhunting as a soothing refreshing process, tending more to invigoration and clear appreciation of life than all the German waters, or all the tonics of home pharmacy—or even the most Spartan regimen of diet and training. The frame is never more fit, or the brain less burdened with cobwebs, than after day-to-day hunting—stipulated always that long railway journeys or ultra-Meltonian dinners are not superadded to the day's work. Fairly good living is essential, for mind's and body's sake alike. Sybaritism is antagonistic, and will knock away the

* Needless to say this was written previous to news of the sad incidents of the storm in question.

very keystone of the arch of robust vigour. Postprandial reflections these—outcome of the satisfied serenity consequent upon a fair day's sport, a satisfactory ride, and a sufficient catering. At such moments the world looks peaceful and unaggressive—as the blue Mediterranean between its squalls. The muser rises, in a measure, to the halcyon frame of mind of Gerald in the White Rose, when he suddenly leaped out of poverty—"the world seemed so lovely," I have had happiness out of hunting. Believe me, I have had more entrancing happiness still in dreaming it over. And why? Because it keeps one fit, and fit to live, and makes life a thousand times worth living.

Take this for my *Apologia vitæ*, and come back with me, for a very brief while, to the covert-side of Coton. If an old fox and a brace of cubs come scuttling past you, never mind, you are within your rights and have come by the road that the Romans made before the fox took the place of wild boar and wolf. Besides, these freegoing fugitives care nothing for you, and scarcely turn aside. Alas, the whip comes down the tempest like a Will o' the Wisp—bringing many a storm-clad galloper in his wake—and fetches back the couples that we thought to be the van of the pack. The horn is playing up the wind: and the call of business is elsewhere. On such a day the golden rule of the school of which I am but a humble disciple, viz., "Get away on the back of the first fox that breaks covert," is only to be applied with the help of great luck, and may often, as now, be an impossibility. So we hang about the Park and spinnies for a while, shrug our wet shoulders at one another, and mark who are our neighbours of the day. The following names nearly make up the roster, viz., Mr. E. de C. Oakeley, Mrs. and Miss Oakeley, Mr. and Miss Hanbury, Capts. Asquith, McCalmont, and Wheeler, Messrs. Angelo, J. Baring, Flint, Gilbert and son, Gillespie-Stainton, Ivens, Loverock, C. Marriott, Muntz, Nicholson, Oldacre, Powell, Schwabe, Young, Watson, and Wedge.

Finally, we left covert down the gale, and embarked upon the good country of Shawell and Swinford. But, as ill-luck would

have it, struck the line of one of the foxes now fully twenty minutes ahead. Yet—curious to say—in spite of the hurricane there was no failure of scent. Had we been on terms, I am open to believe there might have been quite a good run! It is impossible to suppose that any *body-scent* could have remained amid the boisterous gusts: so it must have been purely a *pad-scent* that guided hounds, and that even now they could puzzle out without much difficulty. Upon this they took us along—at times almost prettily—by the left of Shawell Village nearly to Swinford. The gravel-pit-earths, where Mr. Gilbert had watched a litter through the summer, were shut in our fox's face: so he bore leftward to Shawell Wood, and beat hounds. For the next hour or so they sought a fox in vain. But the driving rain and the pattering leaves had made life aboveground unbearable; and Reynard was not to be found until, at a comparatively early hour, the shivering crew were dismissed homewards.

On Saturday, Nov. 8, I was a little out of my ground; but dropped in for the brightest brief scurry I have yet seen, and found myself among the smartest and sharpest field on this side of Harboro', the Bicester to wit. The run was not quite long enough or straight enough to justify my applying for special permit regarding it. It was nearly becoming a gallop of equal class to two or three others already on the books of the pack in question, for the month past that with other hounds has been so generally barren. Even this quarter-hour's item was the first proper warming-up I have yet experienced—and of a truth it was very evidently and practically appreciated, by a party of men well suited to the occasion. Seeking safe pilotage, my eye suggested choice between the noble Master, and a certain Leicestershire lord—whom I had oftentimes seen carving the way over his own broad acres (Lord Lonsdale). Here he was on strange ground and carving with a borrowed weapon. But none the less deftly did he carve. Both were giving me and most of us a couple of stone: and both were fitly mounted and caparisoned *cap à pie* for the occasion. Accordingly, first I pinned my faith to the former—but he soon left me in a bull-

finch that blacked and bloodied my only still presentable feature. So I turned to the other; but he shortly played me a wicked trick—for he swung over some great wide-ditched timber and left me to slink ignominiously through a hole at the side. So I came to the conclusion that, sincerely as I esteem and

respect blue blood, I was far from “loving a lord” as a pilot; and, staunching my own common carmine as best I could, elected to take my own line of gaps in comparative safety. For the first time the grass was excellent going, and the plough was almost deep.

Monday, Nov. 10, found the Grafton in full panoply at Preston Capes, on a beautiful hunting morn—with a very representative field—all victims to the tailor’s homœopathic creed of putting all possible weight on with a view to taking weight down. Here are a few names, with every apology for omissions. Mr. and Mrs. Douglas-Pennant, Major and Mrs. Blackburn, Capt. and Mrs. Allfrey, Capt. and Mrs. Paget,

Mr. and Mrs. Craven, Mr. and Mrs. Byass, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, Mr. and Mrs. Blacklock, Mr. and Mrs. Vaughan-Williams, Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, Mr. and Mrs. Church, Mr. and Mrs. Peareth, Mr. and Miss Burton, Mrs. Clerk, Mrs. Martin, Lord Southampton, Sir Rainald Knightley, Sir William Humphery, Gen. Clery, Col. Fife, Capts. Askwith, Faber, Riddell, Messrs. Adamthwaite, Baring, Campbell, Elliott, H. Gosling, Holloway, Johnson, Knightley, Lees, Macdonald, Manning, Riddey, Roberts, Roche, Tibbets, Walton, Waring, Wellesley, Wilder, Wiseman, &c.

Beginning a week late, the Grafton have in the matter of appearance, a distinct advantage over their neighbours. Hence so much irreproachable completeness on every hand this day. A week of dress rehearsal had rivetted the joints in many an armour that hitherto—if only in the too conscious eyes of the wearer himself—may not have knitted closely. Ah! the gift that we really need in the pretty world of the hunting field is not so much “to see ourselves as others see us.” That might be altogether too unsatisfactory. But rather to realise how little the inquiring minds of others go beyond the impression they have very recently carried away from the home looking-glass. On the other hand, it is very safe to say that these self-conscious units all go to make up a very pleasing whole—a field of dainty horsefolk—an assemblage that, from its very brightness, helps more than all to maintain foxhunting as a brilliant and popular institution.

But about the sport. Twenty minutes racing by gateway from pasture to pasture. Then Badby Wood—deeper even now than for the last half-dozen years, though the turf outside is still almost hard—round and through, backwards and forwards, for an hour. Then outside, for two little fences. Horses had at this time so entirely set aside all notion of such diversion, that they tumbled in a fashion only to be defined as haphazard. Enough smart men were soon running about in the track of hounds to have made a field for a pack of foot-beagles. And, by the way, of all the woe-deploring faces I ever

saw worn by human being, save on the gallows or at the gun-wheel, the most pitiable was that of a well booted and breeched second horseman, when ordered to give up his mount to his master and to set off afoot to Daventry—there to seek the latter's riderless runaway. It is only fair to add that his master first lightened his load as much as possible by distributing the contents of a sandwich box, the size of an overland trunk, among his circle of friends. But I think I shall long recall that pitiable face, and picture the white-leathered limbs trudging wearily away into the dim distance.

Their fox was pretty well worked to death before he consented again to leave Badby Wood. He then only crawled up to Badby House, and there died—two hours from the find, the intermediate time, as I have described, having been divided between the richly-gated pastures of Fawsley and the muddy mazes of Badby Wood (I refer only to some further bypaths, and am far from intending to cast the faintest aspersion upon one of the most valued and invaluable coverts in the two Hunts). It is rather late to say where our fox was found. (I fancy I have mislaid a page of MS., or perhaps used it to light my last overnight cigar, when I shied away the pen at the welcome promptings of sleep.) But the foxes—two brace of them together—were found late. Not till we reached Charwelton Osierbed, and it was thence that we galloped the gates for our lives, over the wide green domain of the revered house of Knightley. 'Tis on a miniature scale, the Aylesbury Vale of Northamptonshire. The Grafton lady-pack were in great form, whether darting and twisting over the greensward, or chirping and driving hard round the deep woodland of Badby. There was a sparkling scent.

Tuesday, Nov. 11th.—The North Warwickshire at Dunchurch. The morning came in with a storm that seemed a duplicate of Friday; but that eased off, with a shift of the wind, till one's wet-weather-kit became superfluous to the eye and distressing to the body. We had a run—a capital run—having only one drawback, on which we will dwell as little as

possible. To most of us the treat was altogether new. Our ears had been tickled with stories of "a dart with Mr. Fernie," and "a clipper with the Pytchley." We had said Yea, and hoped for our own turn. It came in very fair fashion with Mr. Ashton this Tuesday afternoon. Prior to one o'clock a pleasant scurry had been scored from Cook's Gorse; and a brace of foxes had been killed in its immediate neighbourhood. It remained for the afternoon to provide the pith of the day—from Hilmorton Gorse. It is early in the season; but there was a little world of riders. A score of years ago Mr. Little Gilmour assured me that twenty men were now riding hard to one in his youth-time. The ratio, I make bold to say, has completed itself again since then. Else am I beginning to view bravery in the form of mere freedom from causeless fear. Perhaps it is so. But there were no spectres worse than a half rotten ox-rail in those days.

To history. 1.45 by the watch when hounds issued from Hilmorton Gorse, a minute after their fox. An hour later they had him in the open. My estimate of the Crick country is first founded upon boy's experience under Charles Payn—and may accordingly be an exaggerated one. But, to put it mildly, I esteem it as second to none in the Grass Countries. So, when—under orders correct and pronounced—we pulled up for a moment in the Watling Street, small wonder there was half-assured happiness—not to say, nervous anxiety—pourtrayed in fifty faces—faces as yet set and concentrated, by no means effulgent as with the glow of a run in full fling. In plain, unbaptized English, we are at such times "in a devil of a hurry,"—afraid of being choked off, interrupted, or led astray—afraid of we hardly know what. For the indefinite is before us—and possibly we are not quite sure of ourselves. So it was almost like a jest at a ghost séance, that the spell was momentarily broken by a distracting trifle. 'Tis hardly worth telling. But when a bold stranger leaped his way into the road—(Only strangers are bold. We who know every fence, and would like to know a great many more gates than we do

are mere skilful shirkers)—it was funny to see his little horse play with a big one as we are led to believe a rhinoceros fights with an elephant. He landed with head very low—happily for him—tucked it completely under a big horse galloping across him—lifted the other's girths to his own topmost height—both spun round on their respective axes, and both went contentedly on, in the proper direction. But I shall not get through the run at this rate—Hounds left the Old Road where it enters the fields, and, on a good scent, drove, almost of course, up to Crick Covert. But, without entering, they skirted and held on—swinging rightward from the gorse. The top of the hill divided the better men, who knew not or would not know, the country, and the more clever gallopers. And the former competed closely among themselves as to right of breaking the ox-rail on the summit. (Blessed and pure is a good ash-rail in these iron times.) No great hurry, but fast hunting, over and beyond the new railway above Kilsby—where the pace freshened and difficulties thickened. Oh, what a country! But you had to take it edgeways, and corner ways, and roundabout ways. Give us a chance—good farmers, good fellows. Let the blacksmith go round. We can only live once and die once, it is true—but it would be no pleasure to you to have a man carried dead to your door? Yet hounds ran charmingly; and we rode to them where we could—the sturdy timber and blackthorn seeming quite strong enough to need no extra protection whatever. Who made the best of their way 'twould be impossible to say. There were veterans of the soil—of all sizes and weight—may I say it?—from Mr. Muntz to Mr. Wedge. There was an ex-master pinned down by his coat tails after a cropper at timber, and fair ladies fluttering over sizeable oxers as lightly as if habits were wings. There were newcomers from Ireland (and I shall take the liberty of appending a note of admiration to the name of Captain Steeds); there were men who had learned to ride in the Harrow Vale; and there were strangers in mufti, apparently underhorsed, but very obviously capable.

Beneath Kilsby and Barby—almost to the canal side—hounds pressed their game hard, brought him back to and through Kilsby and ran him down fiercely among the hedgerows.

Wednesday, Nov. 12.—The Pytchley at North Kilworth, on a morning that put the bright and sunny side of life in vivid colour before one. Nor do I know that anything throughout the day came specially to dull its brilliancy, unless through the healthy medium of fresh earth and new coats. I read somewhere "To smell to a turf of fresh earth is wholesome for the body." But I would qualify the quotation. Earth is a kindly mother. But she should kiss her sons only. To imprint a rough salute on her daughters is doubtful kindness, needless attention—and there were two or three who bore her sharp imprint to-day. We rode a delectable country. Each fence stood up clearly, and not awfully, though the ditches lay shrouded somewhat indistinctly. But in neither was the harm. It was found rather in the excessive vigour of the phalanx that swept over them. *Everybody* was on the ride. They ride exceedingly fair—to one another (I say nothing about the hounds, that is a business between them and the Master—and it must be added, all listen instantly to his word). But anxiety brings close quarters, insufficient scope, excessive and unnecessary grief. Good horses and gallant men to-day were down to a merry tune. I believe, and hope, that neither men nor horses were hurt. But there will be repairs to be made good, by both purveyors of horses and makers of coats.

From Kilworth Sticks we had a trifling run—after finding some lively foxes. Half an hour sufficed for the killing of a young one in Bosworth Village. But, heavens, how we started—a false start and a fair start, the latter remarkable for being three fields after a shepherd dog. The shepherd dog was right. But that is hardly sufficient excuse. One man had got a magnificent start—meant to keep it—and we meant to have it out of him. But he held his own till he had circled over five fences to come back to the pack.

In the false start there was nothing more edifying than the

flight of backs—black backs, scarlet backs, brown backs, steel backs, and pepper-and-salt backs. I know them all by their backs—the advantage of habit and place. And I know, as I gallop, pretty well what position those backs will occupy twenty minutes hence. The majority will be with me. Some won't be even there.

The truest sport of the day lay, as often, in the afternoon—South Kilworth Covert the source. Scent was what I may term of a squeaking description. Hounds ran a field, stopped, squeaked, and the world rode. A catchy scent was an accepted fact—or should have been—in the first two miles, at most. The world was incredulous; and the moment a single hound squeaked again they were in for “thirty minutes without a check.” There are positions in which to be an object must be far happier than to be, perforce, objector. Objects care little—’tis the duck’s back and the water again and again. But the objector, respected and obeyed though he be, has to find the water. Small blame, if some with less command over their resources, temper that water strongly.

With a hunting scent hounds took us round South Kilworth, amending the pace considerably as they moved on for Misterton. By the bye, it was just this line that the Pytchley took at the commencement of the greatest run of their annals. You who have Mr. Nethercote’s history of the Hunt will find it on page 161; and it is worth your turning to. I happened to spend last evening with one who rode in it (thirty-six years ago, the Crimean November); and heard much of how Charles Payn ran one of Mr. Gough’s Scotch foxes a sixteen mile point and a twisting course of *thirty-two* miles.

To-day’s was no great run but an excellent hunt—by Mister-ton Covert, Swinford corner, to Swinford Village and Shawell—an hour and a quarter. Their fox seemed all but in their mouths, when hounds suddenly struck two lines—the one up a road, the other at an angle across the adjoining field. And they never deciphered the double turn. The feature of the day really was the prevalent and intense desire of everybody to jump as often

and as quickly as possible, with results in many cases as above—
or as below.

I canna tell 'a', I canna tell a',
Some gat a skelp, and some gat a claw,
Some gat a hurt, and some gat nane.
Ane got a twist o' the craig,
Ane gat a bunch o' the wame,
Symy Haw gat lamed of a leg,
And syme ran wallowing hame.

It is not my business to be personal. But sometimes I venture a liberty with old and tried friends. Among our blithest riders, our keenest sportsmen, is one who, besides having—or assuming through the medium of an early family—the age of a senator, has three stalwart sons. These all ride admirably, but not a bit better, or harder, than “the Governor.” He doesn’t mean to be beat; while, with them, the sentiment of respect is,

in the field, to a certain extent commingled with that of laudable rivalry. The Governor got down. In a moment one hopeful landed within earshot—*i.e.*, a hand’s breadth—while the other two pulled up just in time to leave the parent with a whole

skin, and to do their filial duty. This they accomplished by bidding the Governor get up as fast as he could, and flinging a long shot of denunciation (and self exculpation) after the flying brother. Who shall say now that foxhunting is not a levelling pursuit?

It is said that a certain fashionable congregation were recently soundly trounced for taking their ease on the day of rest with their sporting paper as befitting literature. The reproach shall not lie upon *The Field*. Here is a Sunday story, and a *fact* of to-day—which will, besides, serve to show that the young fry of the Grass Countries are brought up not solely secularly. The small son of one of the very good yeomen who form the backbone of the Pytchley Hunt was to have his ride with hounds at North Kilworth this morning. When kneeling to his prayers overnight—his little brain glowing with thought of the morrow—he said, “Mother, will it be wicked if I pray I may get the brush?” “No my boy,” replied the sensible matron; “you might do worse than that.” “Then I will,” said the little one; and he did, in all earnestness and piety. This morning he appeared at the meet on his shaggy pony; his father told the episode to the Master, and when the first fox was killed at Bosworth, His Lordship, with true kindly feeling, presented it to the boy. You can draw your own conclusion, as to the virtue of innocent dreams and prayers.

MUGGY MORNINGS.

GRANTED that weather is an important factor in fox-hunting—its friendly help has been with us in the week past, enhancing each day's outing, putting a pleasant aspect on all we saw and all we did, and pushing optimism, as it were, down our throats. You and I love hunting for hunting's sake—in fair weather and in foul? But fair for choice. We would rather not be blown about; we would rather not be chilled to our toes; we would rather not curl and shrink from a stream of cold water down

our backs. No, a warm sun and a hothouse atmosphere are better than these, though we had rather have been habited for the occasion. A cashmere jacket would better have suited either sex for this November—flannel and super-Melton are altogether out of season. We melt under them ; and dwindle, whether we can afford it or not.

I take Tuesday, Nov. 18th, for my first sample and excellent day's sport, provided for us by Mr. Ashton and the North Warwickshire, almost wholly on the plain of Dunsmoor—a district that will readily interpret itself as a moorland at the back of Dunchurch. Not that it is by any means moorland nowadays—if it was, as I believe, almost within old man's memory. Its light soil has been ploughed and grass-sown in pretty equal proportions : and arable and turf alike are separated field from field by the deep wide ditches and hazel-covered banks originally employed to drain the waste and to partition its enclosure. These ditches are at the present moment so many bramble-hid graves. But horses, like ourselves, have a keen perception of the awful ; and to-day there were very few falls, though I may safely affirm there was occasion in one hour to jump as many blind ditches as all the rest of the week is likely to insist upon. And Dunsmoor as far as my experience goes (which is that of several Masterships) is very fair scenting ground. Added to which, it is this season exceptionally foxed.

A morning's drizzle was the prelude to our daily Turkish bath—the latter operation lasting about fifty minutes, and sending us home, well-satisfied, before three o'clock—the climax of the process being the steaming tub, from which Phryne herself might step down glowing and ravenous to a hunter's feast. A thirst that is worth fifty pounds, an appetite that allows no leisure to study a *menu*, and that *menu* a befitting one. These may be trifles : but they are the gift of a day's foxhunting—and good sport gives zest and flavour to the whole.

The meet being at Wolston, the run of the day was from the little covert of Fulham Wood, adjacent to the Coventry railway. A blacker fox never showed himself than the furry

fellow who was so nearly chopped in covert, and then coursed by hounds for three fields. He crossed the railway, and hounds dived in and out of the deep cutting almost under the bridge on which we stood—a pretty sight if a perilous chance. How we went and where we went is scarcely worth precisely puzzling out. The merit of the run was to be found in sharp, pretty, hunting, a fair scent, and a pleasant ride, rather than in any boldness or pluck on the part of the hunted one. He only ran straight when he grew tired. Then he led us across grass and plough by Causton, by Bilton Village, to Overslade. The bitches were then running for blood : and in a few minutes more they coursed him down, on the very confines of Rugby town and near the house once Mr. Pennington's, now Mr. Clay's.

“Ride him close up to hounds and see if he will do to carry me !” These were no doubt the home instructions of the morning. And the lad carried them out to the letter. But it was a little hard, was it not, on the poor boy that he should also have to carry a new yellow belt and an equally new sandwich-box of very fashionable proportions ? And it was a little hard upon our feelings to have to wait an extra turn at every fence for that sandwich-box. The farmers of 1890 let us come : but they would gladly draw the line at second horsemen—who, *once again I protest and reiterate*, ought to be marshalled and led, in one mass under one keeper, by road and bridle way. And, under whatever obligation as to a lead we may gladly place ourselves one towards another, we don't want it from a sandwich-box, eh ?

A MEDLEY AT LILBOURNE.

WEDNESDAY was hotter than ever—the most chokey day for man, woman, and beast I ever remember. After a quarter of an hour's gallop we gasped like fish out of water, while our horses panted and dripped as if they had been swimming for their lives. Not a becoming day, even for those whose youth and freshness make them more or less independent of the acci-

dent of temperature. We, who are middle-aged and elderly, look our very worst when parboiled. Comfort, workmanlike appearance, and dignity alike forsake us utterly; and, according to disposition, the individual is found either ludicrously cross or profusely jovial. The latter aspect, I am proud to assert, chiefly obtained on this piping Wednesday; and a full Pytchley field was to be seen at its warmest and jolliest—steaming its way through bridlegate and gap, rushing along with coat and habit body flung open (if so be the tailor would permit), their faces ruddy, and (in the case of men) their hats almost floating from their heads. I will pursue the picture no further. Have you ever spent a summer in the plains of India? If so, you remember the melting mood in which, of a hot night, you woke to the fact that the punkah-wallah had ceased his pulling. Such was our condition the day through, and there was not even a punkah-wallah on whom to wreak vengeance.

The Pytchley, then, met at Lilbourne—for perhaps their first crowd of the season. Lord Spencer and his men were on the spot at a punctual 10.45—and the meet proceeded. For a Pytchley-Wednesday-meet is a function. Abbreviation would lead to turmoil—and turmoil never begins till a fox is found and away. Amid such a mass of men and women all passing their morning greeting, and amid a mob of horses similar in multitude to that of Rugby's Martinmas Fair now proceeding, it is marvellous that sorting is ever achieved. When each finds each, there is still confusion. A rider who drives up discovers he has more horses than men; another, who has brought friends upon wheels, has to send his cart home closely packed—and a late-comer meeting that cart may be startled and edified by the sight of a bevy of stablemen, fur-clad and cigar-blowing, whisking homeward an uproarious crew. Jones has got his kicker for his first horse, whereas he had meant to leave his second horseman to bear the protests of which he himself is now deservedly the victim. Smith finds the young one is coughing; while, on a principle of his own, the old mare has been ordered to leave her stable only at eleven o'clock, that she may be in full

fitness for a scurry from Crick Gorse. Brown is armed with the wrong bridle, and Robinson finds himself in a new saddle upon a horse that invariably curls his back at starting. Montmorency's left boot releases itself with a healthy crack from its breeches-button; Mrs. Montmorency's elastics snap gaily under her foot (her only skirt that won't sit without them); and Round-head's gilded hatguard draws its staple out of his beaver. This is a world of small woes. Depend on it, if man or woman look really happy and disinterested before hounds move off, they are people of great minds or of great good fortune. They have heavy trouble at home, or the accidents of life are to-day all on their side.

After all had mounted, when an unusual number were found upon kickers, and one and all were nervously awaiting their turn to be kicked, the cavalcade, lately set in motion, again pulled up to wait. A caravan from Harboro' had just steamed into Lilbourne station. To save the road journey, thirteen horseboxes had been loaded. The unloading was an evolution that the Horse Guards had done well to witness. In ten minutes there was not a pink coat on the platform. All had ridden up and fallen in. Forward, to Lilbourne Gorse—whence half the greatest gallops of the Pytchley have originated. Yet, how a fox ever makes a country from here it is difficult to understand. River, railway and crowded road block him as remorselessly on the one side as Sir William Harcourt does the Hares Close-Time Bill. The beautiful Crick-and-Hilmorton vale is the only available ground: and to reach that he has to dash over the open, past a screaming multitude, and across another well-manned lane. This morning our fox had time to storm the former impregnable position, and be flung back among hounds ere they had followed him over river and rail. He came back through them and through our midst like an angry wolf—a great, raking, “varmint” with ears back and jaws wide open. By pluck he regained the Gorse; and by pluck he attained the other route, southward. Twelve minutes only we then rode: but it was a gay scurry by Lilbourne Village and over the valley

to Hilmorton Gorse. No mutual arrangement existing by which the one pack stops its earths for the other, he found safety underground

By this time one realised in a measure some new-comers of the day. The Duchess of Hamilton was there; also Lord Lonsdale, Lord Molyneux, Messrs. Murietta, Mr. Stokes taking a winter-holiday from America, and many others besides the *corps d'armée* of the Pytchley already assembled.

I might have been tempted to add more on the subject of the country and the way it was taken—had not the gallop been cut short in its bud, and the end come just as the run had fairly begun. Encomium on a district that contains the old Grand Military Course would be out of place as an oft-told tale. After some twenty minutes to cool, the field were led off straightway to Yelvertoft Field Side—and there drawn up on a bridge, as many as the bridge would hold, a sight for gods and for men. It was rightly ruled that the fox should have a chance given him. For this cause the field were securely packed—three, four, and five abreast—regardless of how they might find themselves assorted, approximated, or endangered. I heard but a day or two ago of an instance across the Atlantic where detective and detected were called upon for nights together to share blankets on a journey. There was room for similarity here, if for nothing else. Your pet enemy might for fifteen solemn minutes be pressing you knee to knee. Your bosom friend might be tempting destruction by allowing his underfed beast to lunch off your ticklish mare's tail. You could neither withdraw from the one nor protect the other. It was a positive relief when two hard-riders continued their almost daily duel across country by tangling and fighting free—all unwillingly—in the mid-crowd. The one's reins became tightly tucked under the other's weighty tail. The tail closed down like a vice; the reins jerked sharply; the hinder horse struggled to rise on his hindlegs, the front horse lifted himself on to his fore. One rider had all he knew to keep back in his saddle, the other to keep his own balance and his horse's at all—the crowd was scattered, and the

front rank delinquent sent forward to watch for a fox breaking covert.

This diversion was scarcely over before a fox did break : and a rush was set going. Three fields and a plough team—then

half an hour's gate-and-hill-galloping to the Hemplow, that told its exhausting tale equally on horses and on men. I believe this was a great fox, had he not been driven back from the Cold Ashby brow. A rough highland is the Hemplow district ; and thereon we rose and plunged for nearly an hour in all—bounds changing more than once, and thus missing a kill, for there was a fair scent in spite of the muggy atmosphere.

On an early day of the present week a special train brought a strong body of Cambridge undergraduates to hunt with a Northamptonshire pack. The district was one in which the presence of an extra score or so of ardent riders was in no way inconvenient ; sport and country were quite equal to the occasion ; and the visitors made the most of it. "Never saw gentlemen enjoy themselves so much" described the huntsman, as he narrated the circumstance this morning. Questioned as to who they were, he replied in another pithy sentence (for quick, keen, huntsmen have no time for decorative language) "Couldn't justly catch their names ; but they was all going to be dukes some day."

A CHECK BEFORE ITS TIME.

So this is what was meant by Monday's scent, that burned fiercely everywhere—a coming frost and an early winter? Wednesday has dealt us a slap-in-the-face, Thursday confirms it with a knock-down blow. On Sunday we could not bear a fire. To-day we cannot get near enough to one! Under little more provocation I shall take my twenty thousand a year to Pau; where, besides a pack of hounds, there is said to be a small field and an equable climate. I had it on my very lips to urge six days a week till further orders—and here are the orders thrust in our face, “No Parade till further notice!”

Friday, Nov. 21.—We should hardly have been so pleased with a mere fifteen minutes' spin, had the first three weeks of November been in any degree rich with sport. By no means had they—so men made the most of their little ride, and swore it was “capital fun.” Besides, it came to them unexpectedly. They thought they were in Nobottle Wood for the day, and were pleased as schoolboys when they were sent forth to scamper awhile in the open valley beneath. The Pytchley had met at Brock Hall; had hunted a fox thereat with apparently little scent; and then found themselves in the big wood above named. For once down and for once back the field were keen and lively enough. Then, I fear, the majority settled, in many instances, to luncheon. At any rate they were not there in force when hounds spoke out that their fox was away under Harpole.

A better scent in the open than in covert, which was scarce surprising under this late November's leaf fall. (The oaks only began to disrobe themselves during the week past.) There was every incitement in the view of the grassy, well-fenced vale below, with the glistening pack (you know how they sparkle and glint in the blue atmosphere of a still day) driving into their work, two big green fields away. To clamber the down-slope, to accept the easy swinging fences, was easy, natural, and delectable. A lady was readiest at start, and, I verily believe,

gave an impetus to the possibility to be realised. When my time comes to go a-hunting afoot, I shall go for a hill-top—Robin-a-Tiptoe, Hemplow, Staverton Hill by turns—that I may still conceive the chase in full sweep, throw my whole heart into its vanishing enchantment, and go home to an evening's dream of men and incident, bygone. Leave such for a refuge. Postponement of fate (ill philosophy though it be) is often an essential principle. Why, we are not yet at Christmas. 1890 is still our year of gladness—and the season is young.

In common decency I cannot prolong a quarter-hour scurry. I remember in those brief minutes a dozen early ridge-and-furrowed fields—a vision of striding horses that made almost smooth weather of the chopping sea, so evenly did they glide over it—and I remember a few cheery fences that failed to interfere with the stride. Do you notice—if not, do so henceforth while you ride to hounds (one gave me the office years ago—no other than George Whyte Melville of sainted renown) that fox or stag almost invariably takes hounds where man may follow? It was instanced to-day. Our fox, rather than wet his jacket, at the last moment skirted the little lofty-fenced brook that runs to Floore, that he might cross, dry-padded, a shepherd's bridge with a hand-gate. The bridge was frail of structure and honeycombed. But it bore a led horse. The huntsman then, with a ready waggery suggestive of good times and a sterling mount, rode over to the remark, "Speak well o' the bridge that carries you over." The rest, separated by a fence that it was better to have gone over than to return by, demurred a second while the question of creeping or flying was under consideration—and solved it both ways. Meanwhile Reynard was struck by an after-thought, which did him no credit. "Too hot to last; I'm to ground." And he was—in a spinney and its earth, short of Floore village. It would be an impertinence of me to say more than that I saw at least the following looking gratified and glowing when I arrived at the scene; but the briefest tale unheroic is half complete—the absence of many gives the opportunity of instancing a few, and I trust these few

will allow me the occasion, viz.: Lord Spencer and his workmen, Capts. Askwith, Atherton, Faber, Matthews, Middleton, Messrs. Foster, Henley, Loder, Muntz, Walton, Mrs. Byass, Mrs. Cross, and Miss Burton.

Monday, Nov. 25, was, I imagine, the best scenting day we have seen this autumn. The Grafton ran all morning as if tied to their fox, while next day not only was the air teeming with tales of Mr. Fernie's doings, but they brought us from Melton the story of a great day with the Quorn. With these latter you may have been furnished from the spot. For me it remains only to tell of a hard, ringing run, around miles of old pasture-land, and through many dozens of gates. I am not ashamed to confess I do not like gates—i.e., gates only—even though they lead from grass field to grass field. Nor would I be misunderstood to vaunt a soul superior to gates—I lost that before I was twenty. But gate to gate, with a crowd, is only second-rate bliss—however prettily hounds may drive and spin, however charming the turf and however delectable the mount. At least this is our way of thinking in the grass countries—else should we all betake ourselves to southern downs or northern heath save our collar-bones, save our purses, and save ourselves much of the inquietude of spirit that belongs to those mornings whereon we esteem ourselves “not quite the thing.” No, we go through gates whenever we can, partly because it is customary and correct so to do, and partly because it is safer. But so long as we really enjoy riding to hounds in these blessed regions of Mid-England, so long do we extract a certain amount of pleasure (more or less mixed according to the individual) out of being *obliged* to jump in order to get from field to field. Let the jumps be well within compass, by all means—even of our worst beast of the week. Let there be hedges with fair holes in them or else of easy average height. Let there be ditches, too—and let farmers not lose sight of the fact that good farming includes clean ditches. Let there be timber—well, I am not very strong upon post-and-rails this Tuesday night*—so I

* After trying conclusions with a strong top-rail.

will not insist too stoutly upon them, nor pursue the subject much further. But glorious a manor as is that of Fawsley, I wish half the gates were locked and the keys lost. Then should we, somehow or other, find means of climbing over most of the doubles, and should not, I fancy, suffer more bruise—certainly entail upon each other less mortification from clumsy handicraft, than now. A man in a hurry,—especially if the wind be high or the gate be wet,—is not always to be depended on. Some have not even eyes at the back of their heads. While as to women they are (at a gateway)—a little variable. But enough. Fences, obligatory fences, have not only their own attractions to recommend them, but they give more room to a big field of horse-people than is provided by any number of gates.

It will have been gathered, then, that fast and well though the Grafton hounds ran on Monday—after a Woodford meet—incident was, if not altogether wanting, at least monotonous. From Hinton Gorse and Charwelton Osierbed they ran down two foxes, both over the Fawsley estate—gates and galloping all the while.

BEGINNING THE WEEK.

THERE are ways and ways of killing the week. Hunting six days is of course the only proper principle. But the week has seven, and when the seventh has been duly spent it becomes necessary to return to work. The North-Western Railway admits the principle—and frames an indulgence—the only indulgence of the week to Weedon, &c. It stops a train (under due notice) that allows hunting men their dinner before starting. But on Sunday last it forgot its programme, and its freight—with the result that at 12 midnight, or thereabouts, it carried a whole car-load of fox-hunters two stations ahead instead of dropping them at Weedon. They had told all their stories; wrapped themselves in fur and slumber, wakened at the proper time, restrapped their rugs, and prepared to descend. “A

whiskey and soda with me before you drive home?" "Exactly what I want." "A long time getting there, since Heyford's Iron fires." "Heavens, they are taking us on!" "Did *you* tell the guard?" "Of course I did. Haven't I travelled down every Sunday for a score of years?" Misery—we are on for Rugby! And on its platform they descended—a wrath-pouring crew, magnificent in its disappointment and chagrin. The splendour of magistracy, the majesty of the law, the power of commerce and the flippant side of military-training were all brought to the front—the dignity of the former being sadly hampered by the irrelevant hilarity of the latter, to whom the making the best of a bad job seemed under the circumstances the only alternative. Thus by mute and mutual agreement the seniors were left to pour thunder upon the officials; while the juniors betook themselves to the refreshment rooms, to explode their squibs on the sleepy and somewhat unappreciative fairies that preside over the late liquor department. But the rest of my tale is very sober, serious, and not altogether devoid of pathos.

The bar forsaken, the bar were conducted home—not in the panoply of robe and head-apparel, still less of coach or even special engine, but as mere adjuncts of a coal train—in a final carriage upon which the shock, shock, shock of heavy trucks struck at intervals as the clang of the night clock to doomed malefactors. Tobacco is at such times a soothing instrument. But when those instruments are six inches by one, the most modern cigar case will hardly meet requirements so unexpected. So cigarless, sleepless, and robbed of all attributes that maintain the dignity of men learned and revered, they merely coaled it to Weedon, took ground in the pouring rain, and thought themselves at home. But a Sunday staff has no existence here. The platform was open and free, it is true: but a platform without jury or audience is but a transposed edition of a theatre by daylight. Persuasive eloquence, magisterial tones, rhetorical display had no field—worse than all not a single listener. And the doors were locked, exit barred. Cicero they say, practised at least before a looking-

glass (and hence, one may assume, his exquisite simplicity, that allowed him to be construed at sight). But—to continue to balance *pro* and *con*—these infernal station doors had not even a looking-glass. They were blind and deaf. “Tell you what, old fellow, you are two years younger than I am; you must just swarm the spiked gate out of the coal yard.” “Sir, you are frivolous,” responded the junior. “I’ll bet you a City dinner that *you* can’t, whatever you might have done forty years ago.” “We can’t sleep among the coal trucks,” said the senior hotly. “Give me your shoulders and I’ll try.” So they united forces, and years. Senior left his coat on one side, and half his overalls on the top bar, but went away with a lead,—only to spend thirty minutes in full cry outside their common hostelry. Junior was then rescued in such plight as coal dust and a solitary ducking allowed—and the bar was fully and cheerfully represented next morning at Woodford. Whether the impending suit against L. and N.W.R. comes on for hearing or not, depends much upon whether it be set down for chambers or not: for the outer world is to have no such cheap fun—from legal resources. But the incident has already been accepted as a grave warning to hunting bachelors, not to spend their Sunday, too confidently, in London-town.

Tuesday, with the North Warwickshire at Dunchurch, was a strong contrast with its recent predecessor—a contrast of ride and a contrast of weather. There was every opportunity and occasion of jump; and, when hounds were running, the more ravenous of the party spent no small proportion of their time in the air. The initial velocity of a body set in motion into space, has, if I remember right, much to do, not only with the distance it will cover, but with the period during which it will support itself in mid air. Given, then, a free horse, very little friction indeed between seat and saddle, a voluntary departure, and a broad road on the landing side—how many seconds will it take an average twelve-stone man to play the flying-fox across, and reach the further turf on his back? No answer—then we will leave the question for future solution—and on the next occasion

endeavour to time the feat. Bunker's Hill and Leicester's Piece were the two chief draws of the day; and between these two (a couple of miles or so apart) was enacted most of the day's play.

But this is not Thorpe Trussels or Melton Spinney round which we are shivering this treacherous afternoon? Yet those four figures grouped in yon gateway are surely Meltonian? One is Hon. Sec. to the Quorn, the others have worn the button for many a year. Fool, your drifting mind has gone back a score of years. It was 1870 when Mr. Ernest Chaplin worked the home district for Mr. Chaworth Musters, and rode ever up to hounds. Now the Juggernaut of Fortune has left its cruel stamp upon his back—taking him for a victim who knew more of hunting, and cared more consistently for it, than 'most any one in the Shire of Shires. His glimpses of the sport are now gathered from a pony-trap, while much older men, who love the chase less and have studied it not one hundredth part, ride by in happiness—knowing nothing, caring little, who may be the, to them, stranger gazing after hounds so wistfully hour upon hour. The contrast of such present and past is acutely painful. I might better have spared myself, and foreborne from inflicting it upon you were there not more vivid sympathy in the world of foxhunting than in other comminglement of life. It is in some sense a relief to turn to the other three—vigorous, active, participators still in what has to them been a main occupation of life. These are Captain Boyce, Holland-Corbet, and Riddell, who need no comment, but will accept excuse and greeting from BROOKSBY.

A BRIDGE OF SIGHS.

IT is not often that a thaw in good earnest asserts itself in the country before making itself apparent in London. Thus while many hunting-men were still casting dismal glances upon the snow-covered roofs of the metropolis, the stay-at-homes were

on Monday, Dec. 1st, with the Grafton at Stowe-Nine-Churches. Four or five days in London are sufficient to exhaust the resources of idleness for most countrymen. The unaccustomed regularity and solidity of the three meals per diem, the contempt accorded night after night to the conscience—I mean the clock of the club smoking-room—the lack of sufficient exercise, and the substitution of yellow fog for clean country air, all tend to undermine rustic manhood as surely and rapidly as London rooms will shrivel flower or plant in a week. A London pavement has its studies, and even its episodes—some entrancing, some pathetic, and some, occasionally, comical. It would, I venture to think, add no little to the attraction of the Pelican Club, could they have transported from Bond-street to Nassau-street a little incident of this morning. Two fur-enveloped, frost-rosy damsels met from opposite directions—each with a terrier at her pretty heels, the one English and old, the other Irish and vicious. A furious fight broke out with never a second's warning—and for no reason that I could discern except that the younger dog paid passing gallantry to a third. Both were partially muzzled, and might with advantage have been completely so. But they made noise enough to convey death and glory; and cleared the pavement effectually—the fair owners dancing round in agony, while their pets raved and fought impotently. Hibernia snatched hotly at her champion, while Britannia after the first scare let her old gladiator take his chance, with buttons, as it were, on the foils. The scene was so funny, and so apropos at the date, that it was plainly nobody's business to interfere. And the wild exhibition of spite did not last long. The combatants of this allegory of the pavement soon parted, with bristles up—neither having bettered his reputation.

Cold, cold, cold—whether shown in the ruddy beauty of fresh young cheeks, in the touch of nature colouring the prominent feature of more adult visages, in the yellow and blue of the shivering crossing-sweeper, or in the rags and tatters of the poor woman who—never without infant in arms—makes believe to

sell pencil or flower. E'en the beauty-pictures of the photograph shops seemed to shrink and tremble in their semi-nudity, and to enter mute protest against their exposure, while in flesh and blood the originals whisked by, wrapped brow-high in fur.

But the cold passed away from the Midlands sooner than from the Metropolis ; and, as I have said, the Grafton were out on Monday—with no great result, however—the best item being a late little scurry between Maidford and Plumpton.

Dare I tell it ? Yes, I must—even though I expose myself to a charge of ungallantry or frivolous impertinence. You know that one of the most recognized characteristics of a Northamptonshire field is its courtesy. E'en itself would allow, perhaps, that its very *haute politesse* is reserved for—or at all events is most prominent—when hounds are not running, and particularly when the first rush is not on. It was at a placid moment that on one day this week a concourse arrived on the Avon's bank with a view to crossing that river. The bridge was narrow, with a hand-gate at either end : and the field proceeded to defile slowly across. Hounds, as I have said, were not running ; and polished courtesy ruled the day. (It was not exactly so, I remember, a month ago—but then a fox was before us on that occasion.) Now, it was quite a case of “our skipper ashore”—with his off-duty manners. “Ladies, please ! Let the ladies go !” And they were passed into the pen, a string of them together. The pen would just hold three couple, in single file. But by some accident the leading couple went abreast ; the gate in front slammed to ; and the gate behind at the same moment closed on the last, thus enclosing seven in all ! The leaders, being wedged tight together, could not get at the latch with their right hands ; their education did not reach to using a whip with the left ; nor could they change their position an inch. So there the whole party stood, lamb-like, for several minutes, (while 200 waited too), till a gallant youth alighted, and scrambled past them along the outside of the bridge. I leave you to suggest what seven men would have said during

such imprisonment. I merely assert that not an audible murmur broke forth from the ladies incarcerated upon this Bridge of Sighs.

TO AND FRO BENEATH SHUCKBURGH.

This noon there is a keenness in the air,
Which stirs the blood and makes the pulse beat high,
And the whole scene is most divinely fair.

ALL too much subject have I—in the initial day of the present week alone—can I but evolve, at all clearly, scenes that to the mind's eye already seem but as visions (hazier and hazier hourly unless I can fix them). Here comes in the writer's prerogative, privilege, and reward. To him it is given to grip and recall—for himself if he fail for others—the life, the action, the stirring incident that already, to most of the actors, have been shuffled into memory's waste-paper basket. These others have lived, have enjoyed themselves, were excitedly happy—thought of nothing else, perhaps talked of nothing else, that evening, were discursive upon it next morning. Another event, some other interest, supervened. Yesterday is straightway forgotten—or only remembered as a point scored, another item to the good. I tell you it is, at times, a happy task to start the quill from covert, to set it going upon the line, and, as far as may be, keep it there, till the *who-hoop* goes up—and Pegasus is handed over to the second horseman. Thus, you will forgive me if I am prolix—and wonder not that I am wont to pick up trifles on the way.*

Let me take you with the Grafton—who on Monday, Feb. 9, were at Woodford, did a hearty day's work in their neighbours' countries, and killed their last fox at dark after two hours' hard running over the choicest of Shuckburgh's sweet surroundings.

Of the earlier atoms of the day's doings, it is enough to

* By one Godson it was said in 1770 :—"The Paradise of an author is to compose, his purgatory to read over his compositions, and his hell to correct the printer's proofs."

note (1) that they scurried, very fast and very brightly, for a dozen minutes from Hinton Gorse, before turning from the grass, and the goal of Boddington Gorse, to run—over a mixed, light country at lesser pace—to Warden Hill Wood and to ground, some forty minutes, if my memory does not play me false. I have it, at any rate, distinctly stamped that, in the quicker commencement, no one rode to better purpose than Mr. J. Goodman on his chasing black mare—in herself an apt definer of “yeoman service,” in that she carries him round his own farm on most days in the week, across those of his neighbours on two others, and pays her cornbill from the spring steeplechases. And now for a few names from the Grafton field on this busy day—Lord Penrhyn, Sir Rainald and Lady Knightley, Sir Thomas and Lady Hesketh, Mr. and Mrs. E. Pennant, Mr. and Mrs. Byass, Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, Mr. and Mrs. Church, Capt. and Mrs. C. Fitzwilliam, Mr. and Mrs. Craven, Mr. and Mrs. Dalgleish, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, Mr. and Miss Judkin, Mrs. G. Clerk, Mrs. Graham, Miss Alderson, Lord Alfred Fitzroy, Sir Wm. Humphery, Col. Fife, Major Allfrey, Major Blackwood, Major Blackburne, Capts. Askwith, McMicking, Orr-Ewing, Rev. Mr. Evans, Messrs. Adamthwaite, Barrett, Bulwer, Burton, Gresham, Grazebrooke, Goodman, Gosling, Knott, Macdonald, Martin, Milne, Peareth, Turner, Vaughan Williams, Walton, Webb, &c.

Last year it may be remembered the Pytchley had a sharp, well-finished, run from a patch of gorse just outside Badby Wood, and close to the Daventry and Byfield turnpike road. The Grafton now drew the Gorse, and then two tiny plantations close by. Result, a brace of foxes, and some eight or ten minutes' fast fun to Dane Hole—the Bicester covert (or rather dingle, as they term it in Herefordshire) that adjoins Catesby. For the next hour and a half or so (allowing a quarter of an hour for breathing time in Dane Hole) Reynard was shuttle-cocked from one side of the Shuckburgh Valley to the other. A poor specimen of foxflesh, too—with a mangey brush, a meagre carcase, and a very recognisable black patch on his side.

Yet a capital game he made ; and stood the knocking about, with strength and endurance extraordinary—and he all but scored in the final bout.

Now let us go with the riders. Dane Hole, then, being a deep, dark nullah—to enter it is like descending into the hold of a ship. You are at once lost to all sense of hearing, light, and outward knowledge—and are never happy till you get out again. On this occasion you were happy if at last you put your head above deck in time to know that the boat was launched—was, indeed, pushing off, and the crew “giving way,” steering for Shuckburgh. Catesby’s old monastery ruins were left to the right ; and the course was set over the green sea westward. Perhaps twenty or thirty people were embarked in company : and now the time came for individual action. Dropping all simile, it was needful to ride at moment’s notice where best a way could be found o’er wattle or bottom—a succession of awkward, strongly fenced, streamlets occurring in bewildering propinquity. Over the second, or third, of these, Messrs. Milne, Walton, G. Barrett, and Mr. Orr Ewing landed in quick succession—in no case without a scramble—while Mr. Macdonald, I fancy it was who went on almost as quickly, after something more than a scramble. George, the first whip, pulled a hurdle out for fairer exit some fifty yards away—and to these was chiefly confined place of honour in the flutter to Shuckburgh Hill (perhaps three miles thither as they ran it). Scarcely had they led their panting horses to the summit than they had to remount for the return journey. Their fox had skirted the wood, almost reached the House, and then decided upon returning whence he came—meeting many of the field on his way back. (At this particular period your observant correspondent had dipped below and behind the wood, looking for a view forward—and so was left to ride a stern chase back to Hellidon, where slackened pace on the part of hounds allowed him to take post once more, with comparatively fresh horse. This much in parenthesis.) They hunted on now over Hellidon’s hilly, red plough (the village on their left)—then

threatened the Byfield region, before swinging rightward along the brow for Prior's Marston. Men were dropping off at all points, content with their good gallop—or having done as much as they cared to, for their horses' sake.

Lord Penrhyn, however, with Mr. E. and Mrs. Pennant, and Lord Alfred Fitzroy, were far too much interested in the chase to give in; Smith was determined to kill his fox; while Mr. Milne, Mr. Orr Ewing, and Mr. Church stuck to it "for the fun of the thing" and for love of the sport. In Prior's Marston Village their fox was dodging as if every moment were his last—and as if at most he could only reach the little gorse on the hillside. But, far from such case—Shuckburgh Hill again caught his eye; and, with hounds scarce a field behind, he dared the valley once more. If his heart did not sink, I confess mine did, and probably that of others, for Shuckburgh's Vale is no child's play, e'en at 12 o'clock noon. And it was now 4.30. Mr. Milne was skimming ahead—all honour to him, in his first red coat. He will remember this gallop when, like us, he is in the sere and yellow leaf, and when all that remains of his four-year-old shall be a silver mounted inkstand. The pace we could just—but only just—attain: and fortunately the fences were not wholly unkind. It was late in the day, though, young gentleman, to attempt the big Shuckburgh double! Not even a noonday sun could have looked through that further hedge. Welcome back, however—and forward, again, under the hillside rightward—the ladies now running to kill, and each one striving forward as if with the scent of blood in her nostrils. Mr. Martin's new gorse was entered and left by the same hedge-holes as we made an hour ago, and then there dawned the first glad glimpse of that finish that forms the happiest climax to a gallop with foxhounds. Under the hedgeside stealing, a struggling, bedraggled form—a fair prey, if you will, to the fox-hunter's ferocity! Ah reynard, you should be proud! Yours shall be a noble fate! Another minute, and they shall have you—the reward of toil, pluck and endurance, the prize for whose attainment millions of money are yearly spent in Old

England! Not much to look at are you? But oh for the fun you give, the mirth you engender, the good-fellowship you lead to, and the sport-of-all-sports of which you are the mainstay, and the essential axis!

Care to our coffin adds a nail, no doubt,
And every grin so merry draws one out.

They did not "pick him up in the open." His end, if unpoetic, was practical, almost comical. He found a five yard drain in the middle of the next great pasture—a culvert under an old cart-road, probably. And there he entered—at least hounds said so though there was scarcely room enough, one would have thought, to squeeze himself in. A pole was procured, hounds taken on one side—but no response. The master knelt down and could "see day-light through." So could his son. This was conclusive. Fox must have gone through. Half a crown for a pole-bearer. Good night. But the yokel, having pocketed his beer-money, thought that he could not do less, in a liberal spirit, than give one more poke in return for his pay. So he thrust in his pole at the opposite end. If Old Nick himself had suddenly appeared, I doubt if surrounding sportsmen could have been more startled, than when a mass of red fur bundled out among their legs! Reynard himself sure enough. Tally-ho! He had found some side-chamber, but was taken unawares with a tap on the nose. Hounds had him before he was clear of the field. The hour 5.10. Time since the find, two hours. And apparently only one horse untired; viz., that of Mrs. Pennant, which she had ridden all day.

WHIFFS OF THE WEEK.

WHILE the sun has been blazing in the Midlands, or fog has been darkening London, hounds have been running daily and running hard. The aim of life on the part of the hunting world has been to let no single day escape them. Thus busily have they been making amends for the lost weeks of midwinter: and

large fields and keen fields have been the order of each day. A big field is no drawback if only hounds run : but a big field is its own worst enemy when hounds potter or a huntsman dawdles.

Being but human, and frail at that, I, too, must do as others ; must go with the swim, and hunt daily—happy in good sport and good company. In making the most of one duty, I plead guilty in some degree to neglecting another. I have stuck to the saddle and foregone the pen—in other words, have absorbed my history for my own amusement. There have been events every day—*events*, did I say ?—excellent sport, a run five days out of the six as you will see pencilled below. And I crave pardon for such hasty pencillings—mere whiffs from the evening cigar.

THE PYTCHLEY,

On Friday, Feb. 13, meeting at Long Buckby, had all their sport from Sanders' Gorse. As if in reparation for temporary inappreciation on their part during the autumn, foxes had clustered there in ample number : and the day was signalled by yet another capital gallop—a new line, and for the most part a very choice one. A fox that will face his field boldly is generally stout of frame and purpose : and it augured well for a run when Reynard flourished his white tag so fearlessly across a first thirty-acre pasture, careless of how many pairs of eyes might be watching him. Nor were these a few, you may be sure—though the Atherstone, the Grafton, and Mr. Fernie were all in the field the same day. I will presume you know the country—you will save me after-dinner labour if I may. The Rugby and Northampton railway runs the valley, at a distance of a mile or so from the gorse. Althorp Park and its adjacent coverts are just beyond the line. Our fox went as far as the railway ; but whether abashed by the plate layers, or acting upon some course of reasoning known only to himself, he did not cross it, but chose his direction along the

sloping pasture-land stretching southward from East Haddon. If it is always a luxury to ride over grass, how much more when, as now, that grass is firm almost to hardness, when the fences are clean almost to nakedness, and the ditches have lately been washed and beaten down by snow and storm! The greenest horse could hardly make a mistake, where to take off and what to do. If he failed to do it, 'twas another matter—and one which could not but be of acute interest to his rider—as was patent, ere the run ended, in many an earthstained garment, an exceptional number in fact. No, sir, No! I bear you no ill will—but you chose the wrong day. When next you come from afar to show us how the Grass Countries should be crossed, let me, I pray you, have fair warning and you shall willingly have the chance—if I can so arrange it, of finding me

on a sticky or refusing horse. *Then* knock him, and me, head over heels into the next field—and I may express my sense of satisfaction and gratitude in other words, than when caught, and thus dealt with, on a promising young one. But this

matter is purely personal. The public want only a brief sketch of the gallop—of which I thank you, sir, you robbed me but little. We rode onwards towards Long Buckby (after rising for a moment almost to touch East Haddon Village), then descended the valley, to find a strong country brought to a comfortable level by the felling of trees—their places as yet unfilled. The tree-top railings lay in many cases all split and ready. There will be no wire hereabouts, *Benedicite!* Now we crossed the railway and reached Upper Brington—a fox in view. But was he the run one? I wot not—or how should he so flippantly leap a seven foot garden-wall? Or, maybe, the change took place at Nobottle Wood. No matter. A charming forty minutes' ride, and a clever hour's hunt, had been our portion.

In the afternoon we saw *three more* foxes found in "Sanders' Gorse"—Mr. Sanders himself being at hand, upon wheels, to holloa our subject away. And this fox we saw killed in Althorp Park.

Wednesday, Feb. 18, the same pack at Kilworth House—and again a run, in spite of summer heat, a glaring sky, and a burnt ground. Never believe that a hot sun precludes sport. A high glass and a steady one will always give a scent—even if hounds have to plunge *en masse* into a pond in the middle of a run. I won't say it is nice for men—still less for women—to become overheated, and to look so. But this is apart from foxhunting. If a fox can be run under sunshine, why should we complain that we do not shiver, that we are not buffeted by wind or drenched by rain? Not I, for one. But then I have outgrown a complexion—and am not too proud to fling my coat open, to thrust my hat backward, or to mop an effloriate face. Wednesday's field was half womankind. Never were so many ladies seen taking the country as to-day. But they can do it—aye, and accept their own part, hold a gate, and hold their horses, with the best of us. Personally, I often find one leg on either side of my horse an incumbrance in these gateway squeezes. How handicapped are they with a pair on one side!

Yet they seldom murmur, generally smile—and think under their breath. A soothing, quieting influence and example is theirs. And with their presence men forget to be brutal.

I pass to the run of the day—South Kilworth New Covert (new or old, the two are but a field apart) the point of origin. Hounds started fast—and the ride began with the option of a broad-set stake-and-bound, in which I fear, I descried, as I skirted it, our best veteran on the proper side, his mare engulfed on the wrong. But the twain were in full evidence again ere the chief work began. The parishes of the Kilworths were hunted out ere Goodall succeeded in forcing his fox forward—at length, *via* Kilworth House, Caldecott's Spinney, and northward. Hounds lost no time (the Pytchley never lose time) when they crossed the road where the Long Spinney ends, and laid themselves out on the grass towards The Sticks. Their fox was now game for the open. He bent westward from the covert—a mile hence was in view—and the fun waxed furious. Though in view, he was no beaten fox, but went like a lamplighter to Kimcote Village—a string of Pytchley men proper, such as Mr. Foster, Mr. Jameson (the best man in England to follow with a young one), Capt. Middleton, Messrs. Adamthwaite, Loder, a dark collared stranger, and others, close to hounds as they threaded the bottom, and bore for Gilmorton. A pretty country this—the privilege of Mr. Fernie—and no wire, no red flags, no sickening doubts as to possibilities of progress. Plain sailing, in fact—fences suitable and gates to encourage. No desperate venture as we saw this morning—a leap at high wire, in hopes that a bold horse would take top-timber as his office!

This thirty minutes of the hour was hot, happy and eager—which is as much description as my diary will allow. Slower hunting then to Misterton—a brace of foxes, and confusion, when an hour and a quarter had been scored. This much antecedent to Shuckburgh and the morrow.

THE NORTH WARWICKSHIRE,

On Monday, Feb. 16, took me into a grass country I had never known before. When I ventured to put the "Hunting Countries of England" into press, this Birmingham district was distinctly and essentially plough—as I might call Tom Firr to witness. Now it has recognised its inefficiency as corn-growing land, and has very properly reverted to grass. And grass it is—broad aced, good scenting, well foxed, and lightly fenced. I have it, indeed, in my mind's eye for approaching age—an arena upon which hounds can fly, and on which I shall be forced to face no terrors of top-binder or implacable timber. In the morning we found a fox, we found a canal, and we found a railway, all in the neighbourhood of Bush Wood—and we played upon the three together for an hour and a half, when fox payed forfeit. But this was not the wild country. It was more immediately the country resort of Birmingham, whose villa residences "reddled" every hill. Keen sportsmen, too, are the men of Brummagem—their spirits as yet untrammelled by any of the cares of personal adornment, or the mere foppery of the hunting field. But they are enthusiastic—and their share of Warwickshire is worthy of their enthusiasm. Hob Ditch was the covert from which my day's reward began; and gratefully can I speak of the next forty minutes, under a very summer sun. It was not straight: but that was not our fox's fault. He was thrice driven aside and backward. But he told off 25 hot and merry minutes, when he came back from Liveridge Hill to Ullenhall, and beat Mr. Ashton's clever, and driving, "big pack" by means of road and village.

On Tuesday, Feb. 17, the smaller pack of the same kennel were at Rugby, for the sake of comparison. Yesterday, a pony and antigropolo field; to-day, apparently all middle-England under the banner of North Warwickshire. There were at least three foxes at Hilmorton Gorse, and there was a run—that

should have been in the main delectable, but wasn't. Railways are institutions beyond cavil. Else how could we hunt here to-day, and do duty in the far-elsewhere to-morrow? But there is a certain district, chiefly given over, as far as one can see, to the nursing of young steeplechasers for the winning of farmers' plates—subscribed for by hunting men. It is, to say the least, a little hard that this district should be fenced in by wire against those who cater for such profit and amusement—and I should scarcely think that the comments of the local markets, even if they acknowledge the obduracy of the few who set their backs against public opinion, can be gratifying to the self estimate of those who congratulate themselves on braving it. Hounds went; but we could not, except by gate and in constant peril. We might well repair gaps—and, again and again I repeat, *we ought to*. But if all the country were thus fox-hunting would soon be as the dead languages, a study of the past; and steeplechasing and all country life would go with it.

CONTRASTS.

I TAKE Saturday and Monday, Feb. 21 and 23, as illustrating, not the charm of variety, but the shock of intense contrast—our climate to blame, and the two days being about alike in the matter of sport.

On Monday, at any rate, it was happiness to live—on the very same ground where, on Saturday, it has been painful, almost difficult, to exist. Meeting, the Grafton at Preston Capes, the Pytchley at Badby Wood, respectively on the north and south borders of the Fawsley domain, it is not to be wondered at that hounds ran identical lines from opposite directions.

Speaking first of Saturday, there was a cold white fog when hounds were thrown into covert. There was almost a black one when they broke forth, a few minutes later, a few couples at the very brush of their fox, into Fawsley Park. The rest were hindered for a second by the closely-built wooden railings; but

issued next moment with their huntsman—into outer darkness. A few shadowy horsemen were standing or galloping along the brow. These signalled Forward, and Forward plunged Goodall, horn to mouth and blowing lustily, while plunging headlong down the steep slope towards Fawsley House—the rabbit-holes underfoot about the only things visible. At the laurels a shepherd shouted Forward still, and round the garden and shrubbery we pressed blindly on, depending, for hope, only upon our sense of hearing and our intimate acquaintance with this well-ordered and well-gated estate. To the huntsman we all clung with child-like trust—leaving him only momentarily in order to skirmish off to some high point and strain our ears to the irresponsive mist. A dead, dark silence—the gloom of a ghostly shroud—was over the land, and enveloped and choked us in its chilly folds. One skirmisher caught the tinkle of hound-voices towards Hogstaff, and to the little wood we rode onward—there to find Mr. Goodman, his pony stopped by the pace, and with news that some five couple had gone on with John and Mr. Barrett not far behind them.

To the Woodford lane, then, we scampered—and there, by good luck, the perturbed and anxious huntsman came up with his hounds—after a dart in the dark of between two and three miles. Their heads were up; and, beyond taking a line into Ganderton Wood, they could do no more. Then we progressed from a state of hot fear to one of freezing misery. Gradually we cooled down as we sauntered. Gradually it occurred to us to turn up our coat-collars, gradually to seek under our saddle-flaps for the woollen gloves which might or might not be in ordered place, and gradually we appealed to flask and cigar. It was no use. The icy fog was not to be denied, and it penetrated through every waistcoat and every layer of Jaeger, blanched the face, and laid its cold fingers on one's very vitals. And, besides, it caught us unawares. The warmth of the past fortnight had set us singing the songs of summer. Now in the sudden bitterness we were winter Cigales—half clad and wholly unfitted to meet it. The situation had no comical

side. It opens out the severest possibilities—a chill-on-the-liver (the complaint of fashion and the keynote of most adult maladies), the surrendering of hunting, the handing-in your very life's papers, the snuffing out of your more or less worthless candle! My own sensations, under this comfortless condition of being, include few reflections on such abstract contingencies. But in the misery of the moment I feel like nothing so exactly as a trussed and unclad chicken on Mr. Gilson's marble shop front—my liver tucked under one arm, my gizzard under the other. The slender and more or less inefficient garment in which many of us habit ourselves, under the idea that it is smart and very orthodox, may not unlikely be answerable for such congealed vein of thought. A swallow-tail is like the swallow itself. It takes more than one to make a summer. And the sufferer under the single presence cannot but feel woebegone and chickenhearted.

So I go home, and arm myself with a flannel shirt and a thickest possible riding-belt ("stays," my *valet d'écurie* will insist on terming it, as he hands up the mysterious garment) ere I sally forth on Monday, to meet a burning sun and a well-thawed field. The same people—or about half the same and the rest similar—are very different indeed to the shrivelled, unhappy mortals of Saturday. Laugh and quip and merry greeting take the place of moan and sulk and half suppressed grumble. Pleasure lit up faces that on Saturday were pinched with pain; and the whole world seemed different. In the morning the Grafton hunted their fox down—an immense great fellow—from Fawsley fishponds and round about to Charwelton.

As I sauntered homeward in the warm sunshine—wrapping myself in a pleasant cloud of meditation and tobacco—there fluttered from the tall hedge of the laneside a bird that belongs to the summer quite as much as does a swallow—cuckoo, to wit. Many of my fox-hunting friends might tell me they had seen a cuckoo on the 23rd February, and, while accepting their statement in all courtesy, I should salt it with

the mental proviso that they might have mistaken a hawk for a cuckoo. But, being very country-bred and born, I pride myself that I know a hawk not only "from a hand-saw" but from a cuckoo. Many, indeed, has been the summer evening of my boyhood that I have sat in the shade of Shawell Wood, to watch the foxcubs come forth to play, and the cuckoo swelling his throat on the bough above me—so close that I could mark his every feather. And on the present occasion the mottle-grey bird enforced his identity by darting twice in-and-out of the hedge, almost within whip distance—as if to jeer at a man riding in scarlet under a Junetime sun.

Wednesday, Feb. 25, crept forth from a frost fog again into a bright, almost tropical midday. Indeed, it wanted five minutes to noon when the Pytchley lady pack burst away, with a good fox, from Crick Gorse. Twenty years it put me back at once, to clap eyes on Captain Trotter's familiar back—that I used to toil after through the holes he had bored and the timber he had swept away; his face, his hat, and his vestment eloquent witnesses, as a rule, of the strength of Northamptonshire and the determination of the Coventry captain. Then, as now (if my dates are right), Lord Spencer would be riding close handy—guarding his pack from pressure, and regulating the torrent, as scarcely another can—with a velvet-gloved hand. And then, as now, Mr. Mills would be riding hard and forward—among his many juniors even then. And then—but no longer now—the pride of position would be held almost invariably by Miss Davy, who for years saw more sport day-by-day than any other of the Pytchley ladies. To-day her place in the front rank was taken by two almost strangers to the Pytchley—the one Mrs. Bunbury, riding with all the accomplished confidence she was wont to exhibit with the Grafton; the other Miss Tennant, whose sphere is more often Melton. And yet another was sampling Northamptonshire—a lady from the north countrie, Mrs. Fenwick. If they did not see Northamptonshire at its very best, they saw at least what it can be—and often is. A little more pace, and a little less frost in the ground—

and the hunt of to-day would have been all that we, or they, could have wanted. For our fox took the good line of old time—from Crick, *via* Claycoton, to the Hemplow: no closer description is necessary. It is the same course, almost field to field, that the Prince of Wales rode the year before his marriage—and when you and I were, I hope, in short frocks, or, at most, upon ponies.

The frost of this morning, and the warm sun of this noon had glassed the turf to a degree that was altogether inimical to riding. Some of the best men were strewed in the open fields, others went down as they landed in fancied safety over their fences, or were shot into them as they rode to jump. When a double came (the one that bounds the Stanford Hall estate from Yelvertoft) every horse found three opportunities of slipping up—and many did. It took thirty-five minutes to reach Hemplow Hill, to ground. Had it been done in twenty-five, with the ground good, we should have talked about it for many a day. By the way, did you ever hear a shepherd answer, when asked how long a fox had been gone—"It were a quarter-past twelve?" Thus was the accuracy of the Master's watch and arithmetic put to the test, in mid-chase.

STIMULATING EXPERIENCES.

ON Saturday on which February took its departure, with the sun shining even more hotly upon its last hours of daylight than it has upon its whole career. Never, surely, has the month been brighter and briefer than in '91. A nerve-shattering day, withal, Saturday happened to be, as experienced by the humble and luckless individual deputed to convey his experience to print. He began by discovering a new and tolerably effectual cooling process by which to counteract such gentle fever and half-regret as is apt to follow upon a sociable and well prolonged overnight—viz., a whish through the air at the heels of a runaway in harness. I warrant you such crude

fanning will waft away a head that sodawater could not touch nor pick-me-up exorcise—though the remedy, being rather of the kill-or-cure description, can scarcely be recommended as appropriate to very delicate or over-sensitive organisations. People will tell you that in moments like these the person most interested finds his or her mind making a hurried *résumé* of all past life. I doubt not that, if anybody had been seated beside me on Saturday morning, he or she would have found ample opportunity for such looking-back. For my part, I was far too much engrossed in looking forward, for a soft spot into which to upset the trap, to think of aught else,—unless it was with a vague sense of pleasure to note the masterly way in which the young runaway laid himself down to his gallop, and to clear the rugs from round my legs. At the end of two miles—as attractive to the country side as John Gilpin's notable career—I found the soft spot in the shape of a high thorn fence, and plunged the whole outfit into it with marked success. Damages—one overcoat torn down the back, all buttons stripped off knees of breeches, one wheel-spoke broken, and one young horse spoiled for harness. Good get-out—and, like all good get-outs, refreshing to the spirit and encouraging to the nerve.

Equally stimulating was the next item of the day, quite as fast and furious, and, for choice, rather more palatable. The same kind kismet that had landed me into a soft thorn bed brought me, on a farmer-friend's pony, in touch with hounds at the moment they were being galloped to a holloa in the Boddington Vale (Bicester), and allowed me to chime in just as Lord Chesham, Lord Londonderry and several near associates were popping out of the long spinney that bisects the plain. Close at their fox, hounds kept their field at fullest stretch alongside the railway—held them by 500 yards, in fact, over the deep-furrowed grass, though gates were frequent and fences facile. It was as a Belvoir scurry of old time—a steeplechase upon the track of hounds, and hounds having all the best of it. In a dozen minutes they turned

their fox, and rolled him over—in our very midst. A seedy fox, of course—or the gallop would have been greater. But it was stirring and blithesome while it lasted. And we all love a ride—who shall deny it. Had time and distance been doubled, this ride would have been deemed a gem. Very delightful is this Northamptonshire corner, of the lengthiest country in hunting England; very sharp and businesslike is the pack that hunts it; and very smart and capable are the field who ride over it. A few names I venture from a most indifferent memory to recall, as instancing some who hunt more or less regularly hereabouts: the Master and Lady Chesham, Mr. and Lady Rose Leigh, Mr. W. and Lady D. Long, Mr. and Lady S. Larnach, Mr. and Mrs. Boyle, Mr. and Mrs. Church, Mr. and Mrs. Blacklock, Mr. and Mrs. Peareth, Mr. and Miss Laycock, Lord Londonderry, Lord Valentia, Col. Molyneux, Capt. Allfrey, Capt. Follett, Messrs. Cassel, Grazebrook, Thursby, etc., etc. And an exceptional number of farmers invariably turn out at these fortnightly meets. Take, for instance, the following, viz.: Messrs. Scriven, Fabling, Knott, Cooper (2), Russell, Goodman, Martin, Johnson, Wood, Sabin (2), Douglas, Griffin, Wrighton, Bromwich, Eldridge, Gardner, Reading, Addison, Ivens, Oldham, etc.

On a third episode of the day I shall not dwell. But for tension of nervous excitement—in that you have to stand by helpless while a fellow being is in extreme and prolonged peril before your very eyes—commend me to the horrid sight of man or woman being dragged across a field, head downwards from a galloping horse. It is only marvellous that Providence seldom fails to carry the sufferer through, alive. But were I a Duke, hunting a country at my own expense, the first order I would give, and insist upon, should be that no lady should venture out except in a safety-skirt.

On Monday, the second day of lamblike March, the Grafton met at Stowe Nine Churches, and killed a brace of foxes—the first unluckily, the second by running him hard for a twisting hour, till they turned him over in the open. A hot day

indeed. Even men from Australia were to be seen gasping in the close heat, and old Indians to be heard fretting audibly—as only old Indians can, when the thermometer is over 70° and they out of reach of a punkah. Bronzed and sunburnt they all looked—while the turf they galloped over was blanched and faded by the same parching sunshine. The run was from Knightley Wood, and hounds ran fastest over fallow with the dust blowing over them.

Wednesday introduced us to an element to which we have, happily, long been strange—to wit, a high wind. And we liked it neither for itself nor for its effect upon the parched earth. There will be lame horses to-morrow, and more than one sorely bruised man and woman—for that horses were *afraid* to jump their fences clean. Having brought myself, and, as far as I can tell till morning, both my horses home fairly sound, I shall forego to-morrow's hunt, and wait—at all events one day—for rain. (It is too expensive, Mr. Editor, it is indeed!) If no rain comes within a few days, there will be no one in the Grass Countries to go hunting. Already the giant fields of early spring are things of the past. On the other hand, if rain comes freely the farmers will not want much more of us—though, as one leading farmer expressed himself to me only to-day, “hunting never hurt anybody's farm yet!” At present they are thinking chiefly of their lambs and their seed-sowing—and the lambs want rain, and cold, no more than do the New Forest ponies.

But in spite of drought, and wind, and hardburned ground, the Pytchley worked out an excellent day's hunting—the run of the afternoon occupying some three hours, covering a wide tract of ground, and being an admirable instance of what a patient, clever, huntsman can do with a pack of hounds that will keep their noses down. I have often ventured to assert that a slow hunting run does not meet with favour in the crowded Midlands—and why? Because it is almost impossible to view it in any comfort. But this does not apply to the late evening when, as to-day, hounds have already travelled out of

their own country, and the bulk of the field has gone home. Believe me, I have no intention of crowing because I happened to be at out-kennels for the night, and therefore had not to turn homewards as early as some of you. But you will not grudge us our better luck, any more than you seem hateful to us when you tell of a "clinker" that has taken place in our absence—at least you don't unless you wind up with "You ought to have been out! Why weren't you?" And thereupon we no longer believe your tale.

The Pytchley, then, had met at Swinford, and had begun by running under difficulties from Misterton Gorse, to Stanford Hall and the South Kilworth coverts, where reynard accounted for himself, like the young lady recently incarcerated at Cambridge, by escaping. Want of scent stood him in the light of an open door. After this half-hour's hunt, the order was given for North Kilworth Sticks; and a long dusty jog ensued. How they found, and how for a few minutes they flew, is a preface I take on trust—inasmuch as, for reasons that matter not, I was not in my place as *attaché* until they had worked on from Walton Holt and were going slowly past Mr. John Bennett's house, towards the Laughton Hills. Reaching these, we mounted to the summit rapidly, then drew rein awhile and gazed our fill upon the lovely grass valley that separates Mr. Fernie's territory from Pytchleydom, and the shire of Leicester from that of Northampton. Having threaded the whole length of the hillside coverts they hunted on for Lubenham, and hounds were with difficulty picking out the line across a dusty wheatfield, when close in front of them jumped up the fox—a fox—and they dashed on to the grass in view. We had already learned that it was unfair, probably costly and possibly dangerous, to jump the fences; accordingly had resolved almost unanimously not to do so—and now, equally accordingly, were impelled to do it whether we liked or not. It is just that want of absolute unanimity of purpose that sends most good resolutions to make paving-stones. In this case I grant that it is annoying to see hounds rapidly dis-

appearing like a flock of pigeons out of shot, while you and your cowardly, or careful, soul hurry off at a tangent to find a safe gate. But it is ten times more annoying if one or two reckless spirits make the venture, laughing your qualms to scorn, and riding off to leave you in the lurch. It isn't to be stood. Therefore, say I, if a man would be prudent at all let him stop prudently at home. It is not worth while to be hunting if you are to be persecuted all the time by considerations of caution and restraint. In the present instance the whole party quickly cast all such uncomfortable self-discipline to the west wind, and followed it hotly across the Market Harboro' country to Bowden, in spite of occasional ox-rails, of wide ditches, and bony banks. Close to Bowden House hounds came to a check, and once more to slow difficult toil. Already we had come to a point of eight miles, and already we had cordially accepted Mr. Jameson's hospitable suggestion that all should moisten their dust-dried throats ere dispersing. But we had to carry our thirst—or put it aside—for many a mile yet.

Our fox had laid up once more, by the canalside: hounds started again on sight: and now for some reason—possibly that they had been almost standing still for some minutes past—horses began freely to fling their burdens upon the ground. Falls ensued at the rate of about one a minute—for a while. And as we had turned back into the wind, scent freshened, and now and again hounds travelled fast. They made the return journey to Lubenham in quick time, but to the Laughton Hills again in slow, then dipped into the valley and went more merrily than ever for a couple of miles along the base of the hills. At the far end they got right up to their fox, but he slipped over the brow, and they ran him smartly towards the village of Laughton and rounded that of Mowsley—this, again, some of the prettiest of Mr. Fernie's charming country. By the way these men of "Billesdon or South Quorn" must be hard beyond compare. It takes only a barbed wire, and very little of that, to stop us of Northamptonshire very effectually. But

if a farm between Lubenham and Bowden provides any criterion, it takes not merely a thin barbed strand, or even a quarter-inch iron rope, but actually chains, stretched for furlongs together, to stop *them*! One of our number, with forethought begotten of long experience, had provided himself with a key to the single wire. But the iron chains and the rope remain to be dealt with by home talent and influence.

After all, our fox had to be let go in the darkness. Arrived in the neighbourhood of Shearsby, and pointing once more for Walton Holt, it was found necessary to stop hounds as soon as a ploughed field slackened their pace—though it was hard for hounds and huntsman to give him up, when already three or four times he had seemed within their grasp. At this time—5.40—they were, I imagine, little less than twenty miles from kennel.

BOOTS AND BREECHES.

It was a happy thought on the part of Lord Spencer that gave us another last morning's hunting and yet allowed us to be present at the House of Commons Point-to-Point Race. The Pytchley met at Weedon Barracks at nine, and thus a busy week culminated in a double ration of sport.

At 9, in the morning of Saturday, March 21, the Pytchley came to Weedon Barracks; and, moving off with very little delay, took some sixty or seventy early breakfasters with them to Dodford Holt. Minute by minute, however, and hour by hour, the others cropped up, till at length the Pytchley had about their usual number. To see hounds thrown into covert at that hour brought one back—only in mind and imagination, alas—to October—when the country was not half as suitable as now—when the leaf was on the thorn, when the ditches were as pitfalls, but when we had five months' glad, and we hoped unbroken, happiness immediately before us. Now the fences seem, of a verity, to open their arms—to have flung off all their covering and half their terrors. And, whereas some of us

would not ride ten miles to covert before Christmas, one and all have woken fully to an appreciation of the hound, and will miss not a day's hunting—no matter what the distance or the difficulty. Every pasture, too, was manned by bootmakers intent upon seeing the fun and shouting at the fox. Very sporting fellows are the cobblers of Daventry: and more than any of us do they inveigh against the short allowance of hunting that the winter has vouchsafed. The Dodford fox, being neither stout of heart nor strong of limb, favoured their views to the utmost: and accordingly they were in the thick of the fun till he was killed.

To snatch Braunston Gorse on the quiet was a delightful chance, and hope ran high when we found it unsurrounded, and knew it to be well-tenanted. Surely Shuckburgh and the mid-distance never looked more inviting than now in the sombre colouring of bleak March—the foreground in rusty yellow, gridironed by black bars, and the background dark and sharply defined in hill and rugged woodland. Was the long-looked-for run to come off? No. But it nearly did. Hounds set their heads right, and we were bidden to go—till at the end of ten minutes it was found that six couple of hounds alone were on, with about as many riders, and that the rest had slipped away, somewhere. In fact they had been carried back almost to the covert, by another fox. Beyond these few minutes—which had brought us upon the delectable country just about to be ridden over by the Members of Parliament—little good could be done, though hounds tried on nearly to Catesby.

Then it became necessary to cross the little stream; and a convenient handgate and ford were found. Yes, but a crafty old willow-tree had bent under the recent blizzard, and now formed an archway exactly over the opening—its many small and supple branches dipping almost to the water. The huntsman and his assistants, close-capped, and accustomed to push through covert and thicket, proved that egress was thus possible; and were soon sauntering unconcernedly up the green-

sword towards Staverton. Not so their hapless followers. The Master was first pulled off his horse, then a lady, and then there were men in the water and horses running up and down the stream. Some then turned their attention to jumping: but that it takes very few feet of water to frighten the hunters of the grass countries, or even to put them down, was quickly instanced by refusals and falls. No help for it. The subjugated host had to pass under the yoke as best they might; and a season of confusion and dismay ensued that baffles at least my feeble powers of description. There were men wading and splashing and shouting: and womenkind shivering hopelessly on the brink—till a happy thought occurred to the latter, and, more or less reluctantly, was generally acted upon. A single plank, close at hand, stretched across the stream. The ladies with one accord made themselves into mounted infantry, left their horses to be whipped or led through the horrid chasm—and a minute later Busvine, Scott, Höhne, and every other known builder of safety skirt, were being gathered and hurried in single file across the bridge. When they reached the other side, so many loose horses, saddled and side-saddled, were in stream or just out of it, that it took several minutes to sort them. For my own part, as owner just now of only one at all passable hat, I was glad to follow the example thus set: and, my odd-job man appearing at that moment with a second horse, I loosed him off at the outlet to ride one and lead another, while I acted on the good old principle of “going round” in leisurely safety. Needless to say, that as usual he turned up smiling—having left nothing behind him in the willow-tree but his cockade and his collar, both of them well-worn properties, and already, he assured me, ripe for renewal.

But it was not a nice day on which to get wet, even to the knees, as more than one good fellow acknowledged, when later in the day he found himself a mark for the north-east wind on the Staverton Hill to the refrain of

Oh willow, willow, willow !
Sing, oh the greene willow shall be my garland.

Previous, however, to seeing the red-coated legislators set forth on their journey, to reappear in chase of the grey mare, foxhunters had another scrap of warmth dealt out to them—to wit, a sharp, bright gallop from Staverton Wood to Badby Wood—the pith of it comprised in the fifteen minutes between Badby House, Newnham Village, and the main earth at Badby Wood.

CHIMNIED AND CORNERED.

DEPEND upon it, if Everybody said it was a good run, it not only was, but possessed the unusual advantage of being so ordered that Everybody could see it—as indeed we did, and enjoyed ourselves amazingly; were “at the top of the hunt” throughout, and went home pleased with all the world and with foxhunting in particular! Did we not?

And yet, who—forcing his way to covert that morning with his head leaning against the half-gale, and his thoughts mournfully bent upon the malignant and obtrusive hardness of ground—and of fate, in that already, on the 6th of March, hunting seemed almost at an end—who would have dared to predict a scent, and a run? Certainly not I—though I have been at the game just long enough to learn that the unexpected generally happens in foxhunting; and that our allowance of sport and enjoyment is almost invariably in inverse ratio to expectation and prediction. You take your two best horses (have perhaps been foolish enough to keep them in a day or two beyond their turn, with a view to this very occasion) and you take them to your best meet of the week. Weather, country, good spirits and self-content all contribute their share to the general sense of satisfaction and optimism that possesses your soul. And what is the result? Well, say, such a day’s sport as that of Saturday previous with the Pytchley—an ungracious allusion only pardonable as illustrating to the utmost the argument of improbabilities!

Foxes won’t run; foxes are headed—perhaps chopped. Or

the right fox goes away, in the most desirable direction—while a wretched victim holds the pack fast bound round her home. I leave all personal contingency out of the question, believing always that most of your own ill-luck is of your own making. A huntsman, worth his salt, is seldom left behind; seldom makes a bad turn; when he gets a fall seldom fails to get up again, and without losing his horse. Why should *we*—though undoubtedly we do? I can partly explain. We do not, one and all, come out with no other thought than to keep an eye upon the pack and its movements. To most of a crowd, the pack is an adjunct, not the main object—and the adjunct is apt to disassociate itself, while we cling to our object of the moment, whatever it may be, from coffee-housing to competition. Given the opposite conditions—an indifferent fixture, an unlikely day, a tentative mount—and all goes swimmingly. You are pinned to the sport, intent upon seeing all you can, and the odds are all in favour of your taking home the bright, entrancing memory of a “clinking run and a jolly ride,” therewith to warm the evening and soothe the morrow. ’Tis the fortune of war and the chance of fox-hunting. *Vive la guerre*, and Reynard the Fox!

No; a less likely, or inviting, hunting-day than Friday, the occasion of the Grafton meet at Adstone, it would have been difficult to arrange. The wind was wild, and the earth parched into rock, dust, and hardbake. So much for conditions—now for results.

In Plumpton Wood—or rather in the little covert ’twixt the Wood and the railway—they found the fox of the day. He had an anxious five minutes in covert, a preliminary that I am inclined to think often smartens a fox up—makes a free-goer of him, in fact, and knocks the nonsense out of him. At any rate it warms hounds to their work. *They* benefit by it; and they have a great deal to do with keeping a fox’s head straight. “Moves badly, doesn’t he?” Yes—but so will any fox when going away at his leisure over a rocky fallow field. He’s big enough you’ll allow. And with plenty of time to spare, hounds

having a wide turn to make, ere dropped on his track. Plate-layers on the line pointed the route, and further information from ploughmen and others helped over the ploughs to Maidford. We need not dwell—as hounds were obliged. It was only after leaving Maidford Village on their right rear—and turning almost up the wind—that the run warmed up to life. Then they found themselves on sweet turf, and then they found a scent. Threading the Maidford Brook they went faster every field up the valley, as they passed opposite Little Preston and pointed for Ganderton Wood. Beneath Preston Capes they swung upwards over the brow, then plunged, with the wind, on to the Fawsley domain and its great acreage of pasturage and gateage. Church Wood and Hogstaffe were left just to the right, and the chase swept on heartily to Fawsley House and through its laurels. On the grass, hounds were at top speed. On the arid ploughs previously, they had proved their drive by pushing forward of themselves even where they could scarce own a line. For us, we were now in clover—on the old herbage of Fawsley—for we were widespread enough not to get in each others' way, but had almost a gate apiece. Nor at any time during the run was it to any extent necessary to call upon joints, sinews—or nerves—over an obdurate country.

But we are great gallopers in Northamptonshire: and so here we were, big and little, male and female, all at best pace, all wound up to hottest excitement, all bent upon being “in at the death.” And, as we swooped tumultuously into the last dip, short of Badby Wood, death seemed surely nigh at hand. For there was a big fox toiling up the ascent—scarce three hundred yards before hounds—and coming back to them yard by yard. But the frightened deer came athwart the trail; and the big herd stood in stupid wonder in the very path of the pack. Music was quickly going again, as hounds were thrown into the wood; and through its hollow depths they rattled fiercely—while it was easy to ride through the leafless covert close in their wake. March and April are the months for the merry woods!) Unhesitatingly they drove their fox through breadth—and half

length—of the woodland, emerging near the Badby lodge-gate, and racing for blood across the meadows towards Staverton. As they dashed into a lane, Reynard flitted across the gateway opposite. One young hound alone caught a view; and, while her comrades disentangled the twisted thread, coursed her game in midfield. Three times she turned him, and three times he swung his brush and doubled behind her—till he fairly beat her to the hedge. For minutes then he was plainly discernible making his way from field to field—the pack once more in vociferous and combined pursuit. Despairing of the open, he struggled round into the village (of Badby)—where from garden after garden rang forth the view holloas that sounded his knell. At length—and here our sympathies went up to poor Reynard, and our nature for the moment was inclined, had it been possible, to forsake its “brutal instincts”—he jumped from garden wall on to cottage roof, ran along the thatch of one till he reached a higher, when finding, as he thought, an open earth, popped headlong down a chimney—flourishing his white tipped brush in triumphant farewell. But he had barely reached the hearthstone before a strong hand gripped him by the flag he had waved so defiantly. His sharp white teeth went promptly into Lord Alfred Fitzroy’s leg—a substantial top of dainty hue only just sufficing to make the fangs harmless. A moment more and he was flung from the door—to fight out the life for which he had struggled so gamely.

An hour and twenty minutes the time—the last forty excellent—and the point of an S-shaped run fully seven miles. And he the eighth fox in four days.

THE END.

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